

AUGUST 2017

AFRICA

PLAYBOY

20Q:
JEFF DEAN
MORGAN

NEW AGE OF
COMEDY

JAS PRINCE
RAP ROYALTY

THE INTERVIEW:
MICHAEL HAYDEN

CATCHING THE
WAVES AT THE
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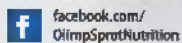
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A woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a white, long-sleeved, floor-length dress, is posing elegantly. She is looking slightly to the side with a soft expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

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Jessica P Ogilvie

"Culiacán is incredibly safe because of the cartel", says Ogilvie of the Mexican city that's the backdrop for *The Beauties of Sinaloa*, her article on the women who compete for pageant titles — and the attention of narcotraffickers. Ogilvie spent 10 days in the drug lords' orbit, without incident. "Don't f*ck with them and they won't f*ck with you."



Ethan Brown

Hot on the heels of *Murder in the Bayou*, his true-crime book set in the deep South, journalist Brown flew to Houston to meet Jas Prince, the young music mogul who discovered rap sensation Drake. In *The Crown Prince of Hip-Hop*, Brown charts how Jas, along with his father, James, turned a kid from Canada into a rap kingpin, seemingly overnight.



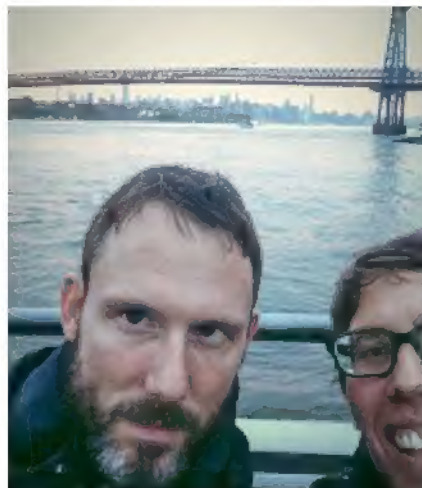
John Meroney

As *PLAYBOY's* political correspondent, Meroney has spent much of 2016 searching for meaning in one of the most dizzying election cycles in US history. This month he pulls double duty with the *Playboy Interview*, in which he drills former NSA Director Michael Hayden on all matters of national — and personal — security.



Keirnan Monaghan and Theo Vamvounakis

Despite the tech-age obsession with everything new, American culture tends to favour legacies. In *Style and Tech*, photographers Monaghan (left) and Vamvounakis capture two staples of those worlds and highlight just how well classic design holds up to innovation.





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ON THE COVER *Ildiko Ferenczi, Photography by Brian B Hayes*

No 61 August 2017



Bigfoot Car Detailing Centre

Bigfoot Car Detailing Centre South Africa is an official partner of Rupes S.P.A Milan Italy.

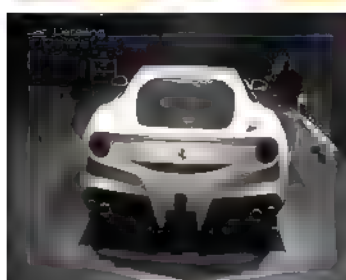
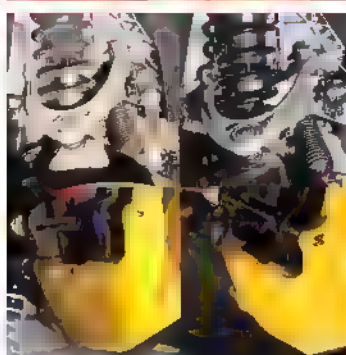
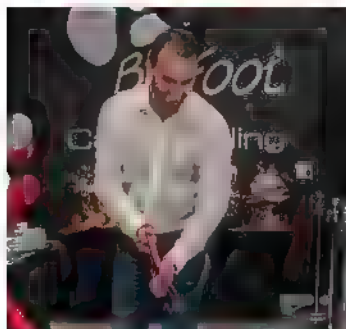
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RUPES



Why Bigfoot Car Detailing Centre?

I have been involved in the detailing industry for over seven years now. My days as a professional detailer began with Swissvax a good few years ago. The day I decided to make it into a business, my main aim was to differentiate myself from the rest of the companies out there and I did this by associating myself back then with a premium brand like Swissvax, which was my stepping stone. Ever since then I have been lucky to establish a loyal client base including corporates such as Porsche SA, Daytona Group, Audi etc. However, servicing my clientele was purely as a mobile business.

I've always had the dream of establishing a centre but not just any detailing centre, something that would stand head and shoulders above the rest. My motto was from the beginning "When you do something, do it the right way or don't even do it at all."

Along came the launch of the Rupes Bigfoot Car Detailing Centres, with the first one being set up in Qatar. What they did with that centre resonated with me and what I wanted to achieve with setting up my own centre here in South Africa. From polishing systems, to the revolutionary machinery, to the science behind the centre design, to the technical specifications around the lighting systems to the entire corporate image. Everything was just unbelievable to witness and I saw my vision of developing a world class detailing centre in the Rupes Bigfoot brand.

The opportunity to create a centre like no other in South Africa presented itself and I grabbed it with both hands.

The rest as they say is history.

The detailing industry in South Africa is still immature in comparison to the United States or Europe, however it has come a long way over the years with people starting to understand what the industry or rather what the profession is about. It's not just about cleaning cars. One of my main goals is hoping to create a greater awareness about the industry and profession as well and share the knowledge I have gained over the years. One of these ways will be via the Bigfoot Detailing Academy.

A first for South African detailing. I have been invited to the Bigfoot European Seminar in March to present the SA detailing centre as well as to facilitate training sessions to over 400 attendees. I will be sharing the stage with some of the world's most renowned detailers, Gideon King, Larry Kosilla and Jason Rose to name a few.

Bigfoot Detailing Academy

The centre in JHB will also become the first formalised detailing academy in South Africa with a formalised training curriculum developed by Rupes Global Training Director Jason Rose.

Jason has been involved in surface treatment for 35 years and many may know him from his involvement with Meguiars and he is one of the most respected technicians in the detailing industry.

Bigfoot Product Range

Opening of the centre has also presented the opportunity to distribute the spectacular range of Rupes Bigfoot Polishers and accessories as well as the new range of Rupes Car Care Products. The innovative range of Bigfoot polishers flipped the industry on its head and has revolutionised the industry worldwide. It has become the detailer's tool of choice due to its ease of use, being very safe on paintwork and extremely efficient.

Bigfoot Car Detailing Service Offering

We have various service offerings from our basic paint protection detail which takes about eight hours. Complete interior detailing to our most comprehensive treatment - The Bigfoot Signature Detail, which will take anything from about five days to complete.

Paintwork protection includes premium Swissvax Waxes and Gtechniq Coatings which come with a 7-year manufacturer's guarantee.

Our value-added services include the fitment of self-healing paint protection as well as vehicle wrapping utilising the best quality vinyl available in the market.



"Well, Mulvey, if April isn't the cruellest month, it's not because we didn't try."

Sriracha Hot Chicken!

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FOOD

It took only 70 years or so for hot chicken to become an overnight foodie cult hit. Legend has it a jealous girlfriend served an overly spiced dish of fried chicken to a Nashville playboy named Thornton Prince, her attempt at revenge turned into the signature offering of the restaurant Prince's Hot Chicken. In recent years other establishments, including Hattie B's in Nashville and Howlin' Ray's in Los Angeles, US, have tweaked the formula for the incendiary dish. LA chef Kuniko Yagi gives us a brilliant Asian-Southern, soy-and-sriracha-spiked interpretation that ups the umami. Gentlemen, start your fryers.

KUNIKO'S HOT CHICKEN

8 chicken drumsticks
2 litres rice bran oil

Marinade:

2 tbsp cayenne pepper
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp sriracha
1 tbsp mirin
1 tsp sugar
½ tsp salt
½ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp ground white pepper
¼ tsp ground black pepper
1 large egg
3 tbsp corn starch

Dredging mixture:

½ cup all-purpose flour
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp ground white pepper
¼ tsp ground black pepper
¼ tsp cayenne pepper

Pour all marinade ingredients except egg and Corn starch into a large bowl. Stir. Add egg, mix thoroughly, then add corn starch and mix again. Place chicken legs in marinade mixture and marinate for at least 30 minutes. In another large bowl, combine dredging ingredients. In a large pot, heat rice bran oil to 160 degrees. Dip chicken legs in dredging mixture to coat. Fry in small batches for 10 minutes or until chicken reaches 70 degrees inside.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT



A woman is lying on a bed with white linens, wearing a dark, patterned one-piece garment. Her legs are bent and raised. In the background, there is a large, ornate wooden headboard with intricate carvings. To the right, a small wooden nightstand holds a decorative lamp with a purple and gold base and a glass shade. The wall is covered in a light-colored wallpaper with a dark, swirling floral pattern.

Christiane Henschel



About me

I had my first Playboy appearance in Playboy Germany's issue August 2004 as the r DTM Playmate. I totally adore cars and bikes and call the world's racetracks my own. I love to travel to watch races. And of course I love to drive my own fast car. I like speed as you can see. I own a horse. And we are also pretty fast in the woods. I spend a lot of time outside with him. That is an amazing feeling. Music is my other passion. I'm a Duane touring through famous clubs and Playboy parties all over the world. In 2015 I released my first house track along with Playmate Katrin Hänel. Once a playmate forever a playmate. My photos get published in many issues worldwide. And I'm proud. I like crazy. I love to wear the bunny costume and be part of this huge amazing bunny family.

My hobbies and interests

My beautiful horse and traveling

My goals and career ambitions

Keep going on with building my own business Corporate Communication Management and Duane

Who inspires me

Strong and talented people. German poets and musicians as well as people who are socially and humanitarian engaged. But there is one man who really strengthens me. The Dalai Lama. I was lucky enough to meet him last year in Italy.

My favourite quote

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep." The Tempest William Shakespeare. I have it tattooed on my right arm inside.

Turn on

Brains

Turn off

Machos

The perfect date

Nothing unusual. I love special moments in everyday situations. It's about him to create such magical moments. He takes me out to dinner. After we go for a drink at a nice bar, dance and kiss. I love to be at the sea. So we could go for a swim around midnight.

My girl crush

Definitely Pamela Anderson. I met her at a Playboy Party where I was her Duane. She is perfect in every way. But most of all I love her melodious voice.

My favourite food

Seafood

My biggest fear

I don't fear something. I know I can solve everything. Problems just appear to help me grow.

One destination I'd love to visit

South Africa. I have never been there but wish to visit.

I'm not embarrassed to say

You are an extraordinary person. Keep going on with what you are doing. (I love to compliment people and give them a good feeling. It's even harder to say something nice than to be rude. There are so many beautiful and talented people out there. I want to encourage them. We all need more positive words and love.)

If you want to see more of Christiane you can follow her on Instagram @christianehenschel or on Facebook DJane Christiane Henschel.



Bra 34E

Waist 64cm

Hips 83cm

Height 164cm

Weight 50kg

Eye color Olive











20Q

JEFFREY DEAN MORGAN

*As Negan, he strode into TV history with *The Walking Dead*'s fanatically debated season-six finale. Meet the man behind the bat*

By **SCOTT PORCH** Photography by **YAN LOWRY**

Q1: Last season, *The Walking Dead*'s concluding episode saw the introduction of your character, Negan, and a major cliff hanger: Negan presumably killing one of the main characters with a baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire. How much did you know at the end of the season?

MORGAN: We ended on that bat coming down. I didn't know who the victim was at that time. I don't think anybody in the cast did. Maybe somebody knew, but everyone on the show swears they didn't. When we came back this year, we picked up directly from there.

Q2: How does a show this big keep a major secret like that?

MORGAN: We've had to take so many security measures. People will hang out where we shoot and try to fly drones over the sets. It's a level of crazy I've never experienced. We hide people in vans to get to the sets so you don't know who's coming and who isn't. We shoot Alexandria—the place where a lot of the show is set—in a town called Senoia, Georgia. The town has become this

big tourist attraction. It has a *Walking Dead* coffee shop. People come from all over the world to this 5-metre wall and try to get a glimpse of us shooting.

Q3: Have you watched the show from the beginning?

MORGAN: I was a fan of the show from when Frank Darabont started it. I was like, Really? A zombie show? How will that fly? And it's not a zombie show. You get into what the characters are going through and how they interact with each other. The zombies are kind of an added bonus. I've been in the comic book world for a while, from being on *Supernatural* and in *Watchmen*. I've been going to Comic-Con for one show or another for the past 10 years, and I went this year for *The Walking Dead*. It was insanity. Hall H holds almost 7000 people, and it was standing room only. We brought everyone who was in the line-up with Negan at the end of last season.

Q4: Has your appearance in that one *Walking Dead* episode made a difference in

your ability to go to Starbucks?

MORGAN: Not yet, but I live in the middle of nowhere here in Atlanta and on a farm in upstate New York. Everyone on the show has said it's a life-changing experience. I hang out with Norman Reedus, who's the brother I never had. We go on motorcycle rides in the middle of Alabama or wherever, and we can stop for five minutes and people will converge on him. He can't go anywhere, and it's like that for most of the cast.

Q5: You've seen it up close, and you're okay with it?

MORGAN: It's more than I want to deal with. *Star* magazine has never given a shit about me, and *TMZ* doesn't know who I am. The show is going to change all of that, and I don't know how I feel about it. It hasn't really hit me yet. I'm already in the process of putting in a ton of security on the farm. After that episode aired, I started seeing weird things in my mailbox and people coming up my driveway to take pictures. The cast members don't go to





the grocery store. They don't go out to eat. AMC has told them in no uncertain terms that they have to lie low until the premiere. We've been given very strict directions on what we can and can't say between now and then.

Q6: *You've been at this for a long time. When did you start acting?*

MORGAN: I was 22 and I'm 50 now, so I've been acting for almost 30 years. I wanted to be a graphic artist. I grew up in Seattle. I had been selling paintings in bars to pay my rent. All my friends were musicians in Seattle when grunge was blowing up. I had an actor friend who was moving to LA, and I went with him. I went to a few auditions and got a part playing a pimp in a Roger Corman movie called *Uncaged*. I remember driving down Hollywood Boulevard in a Cadillac convertible with a camera mounted to it and thinking, I've got this wired, man. I had been there only a month, and I was already the lead in a movie. And then I struggled forever. I didn't break out until *Grey's Anatomy* and *Supernatural* hit, when I was 39 years old.

Q7: *That must have been a hectic year. What do you remember?*

MORGAN: I was doing *Grey's Anatomy* and *Supernatural* at the same time, and then they aired at the same time. Zack Snyder was a fan of *Grey's Anatomy* and cast me as the Comedian in *Watchmen*, which was the exact opposite of Denny Duquette. For a while, I would get tackled by women at the grocery store. I was at the Harley dealership yesterday, and a lady knew I was an actor and couldn't figure out who I was. And all of a sudden, I saw the lightbulb go off. It's Denny.

Q8: *Speaking of Harleys, didn't you and Norman bike up north recently?*

MORGAN: We went to Nashville from

Atlanta. It's like four and a half hours if you take the freeways, but we took back roads through the mountains. I have a new bike that has GPS and we just put in "no freeways." We didn't care how long it took us, and it was about nine and a half hours each way. Just the two of us. It was great.

Q9: *I hear you have pet alpacas on your farm. What is an alpaca?*

MORGAN: An alpaca is a camelid. They spit at you. They honk at you a little bit. We don't have enough for a serious wool operation, but we get enough to process it and give to some of our friends. We have Highland cattle that look like woolly mammoths — they're as big as a Volkswagen — and a calf named Hamilton. We saved two baby ducks that think they're dogs. And we have chickens. I'm usually outside working on something. We built a workshop and a barn last winter, and we're doing an addition now. There's a lot of grass to mow, a lot of snow to plough.

Q10: *You joined Twitter in August with the handle @JDMorgan, but you haven't been very active. Do you have an incognito account, or are you just not into social media?*

MORGAN: I've never had a stealth account, or any account. When we were at Comic-Con this summer, our showrunner, Scott Gimple, said I should get an account so other people wouldn't pretend to be me on Twitter. I have never really understood social media. I don't understand how actors complain about privacy and then tweet what they're having for dinner.

Q11: *Back to Negan. He says a lot of funny things, like "Pissin' our pants yet?" Is that all in the script?*

MORGAN: This may evolve as we go, but all of my dialogue so far has come almost straight from the comic — way more so than any other character. I want

to be careful not to make Negan too cartoony. The world of *The Walking Dead* is so gritty and dark that I wondered if playing him bigger than life would fit. The dialogue lends itself to going super big, so I've had to fit that a lot. Every director who comes in wants to have his Negan moment, and I want to reel it in. We do the F-bomb take, where every other word is *f*ck* or *f*cking*. It's so much. I swear like a f*cking sailor in real life, and it's a lot for me. I've been trying to make him as realistic as possible in this *Walking Dead* world and yet keep the larger-than-life comic-book character alive.

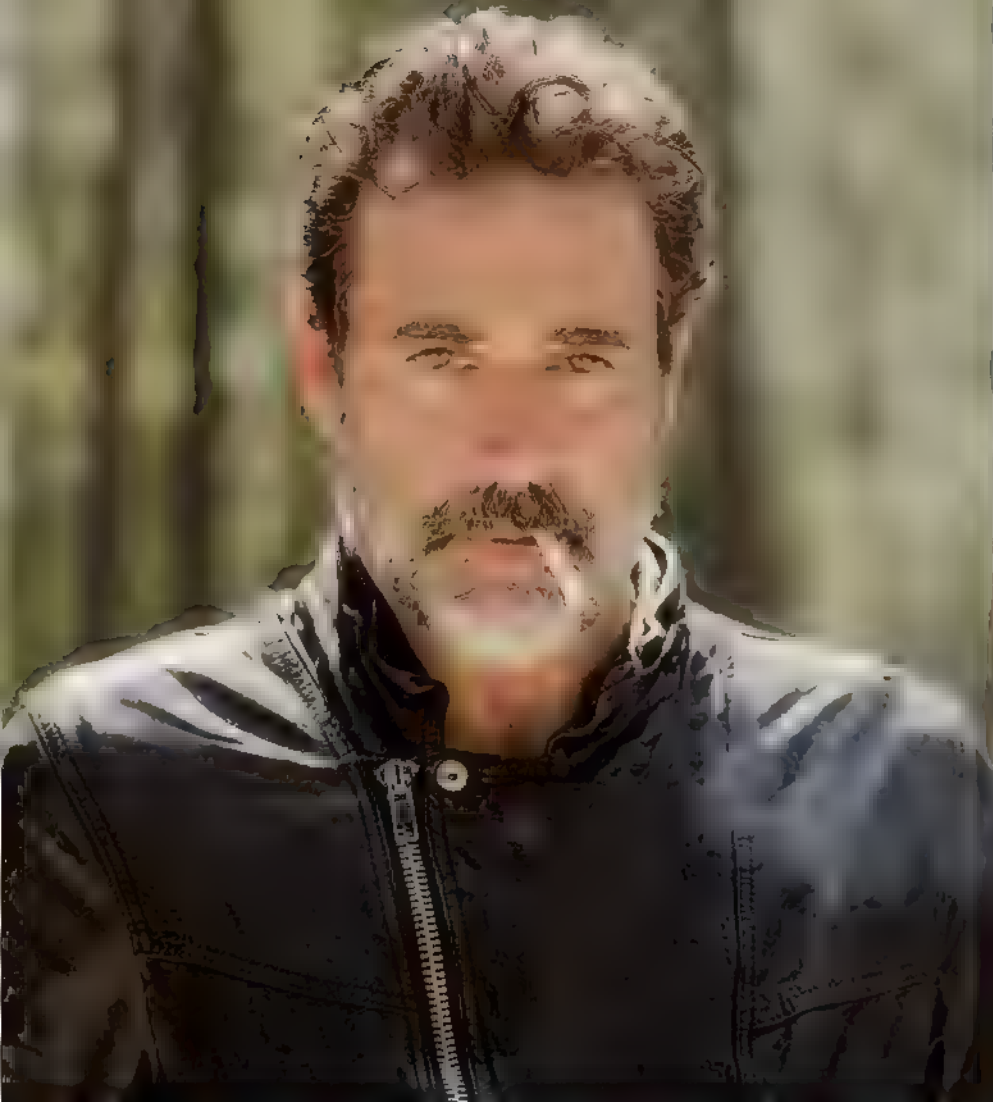
Q12: *TV has a recent history of celebrating anti-heroes and other morally ambiguous characters, from Tony Soprano to Wilson Fisk in *Daredevil*. Do you see Negan as a pure villain?*

MORGAN: The introduction of Negan is probably even more straight-up evil, but it's complicated. Rick Grimes, Andrew Lincoln's character, has done some horrible things in the past seven years. Negan does horrendous things, but there's a certain charisma and sense of humour that the audience would feel if they had been following him for the past seven years instead of Grimes. Negan is coming in and blowing apart the show, and he's a guy people are going to hate.

Q13: *Was he ever motivated by making the world a better place?*

MORGAN: Robert Kirkman, who's a producer and writes the comic series, sent me the first 48 pages of Negan's backstory from the comics. I don't know if it will ever end up in the show, but it's interesting to see that Negan was a husband and a coach before the apocalypse. He was a physical education teacher. He coached Ping-Pong. [laughs] He ended an affair when his wife, Lucille, got cancer, and he was in the hospital with

**I JUST HOPE I'LL BE ABLE TO WALK
DOWN THE STREET WITHOUT PEOPLE
HURLING SHIT AT MY HEAD.**



her when the apocalypse hit. He takes people in and tries to protect them from these zombies. No one listens to him, and they continually die. He becomes this abrasive asshole, this dictator who leads by the threat of violence.

Q14: *He named the bat he uses to kill people after his wife?*

MORGAN: Yeah, Lucille was his wife's name. There's a human in there somewhere. That's the only way I can play a guy like that. I have to approach every scene with him like there's the possibility of a person in there—the sense of humour, the charisma that shows a sense of who he was.

Q15: *Who's your Mount Rushmore of TV villains?*

MORGAN: I love, love, loved Ian McShane on *Deadwood*. David Milch would write these five-page monologues, and McShane had this dark, poetic delivery. Walton Goggins from *Justified*—so sleazy with that snake-charmer charisma. John Lithgow for *Dexter*, which was an extraor-

inary season. And Mads Mikkelsen for *Hannibal*.

Q16: *What makes a villain tick?*

MORGAN: To be a good villain, there has to be some unpredictability. With Negan, it's the unpredictability that you'll survive the conversation. He can be having a normal conversation with you, and all of a sudden you're dead. McShane was the same—he could smile and put a bullet in your head. A good villain has to be smart, and Negan is always a move or two ahead of everyone else.

Q17: *The Walking Dead and Game of Thrones have a lot in common, big scale, big stakes, a lot of character work, bravura violent scenes. How do you explain their insane popularity?*

MORGAN: It's such a crapshoot what people will embrace. I love *Game of Thrones*, and I can't explain why I love it so much. I got hooked watching Peter Dinklage, who is so, so good. I think they're character-driven shows. It's not the zom-

bies and the dragons, people are relating to these characters and how they struggle. A lot of people embrace the violence, but I meet a lot of people who say they don't watch *The Walking Dead* because it's too violent. With our show, and I think with *Game of Thrones* too, people like the characters and they want to see what happens with them. They're flipping out now because they have so much time invested in these characters who are part of their lives, and they're going to lose one of them. I just hope I'll be able to walk down the street without people hurling shit at my head.

Q18: *Is The Walking Dead all you have time for, or are you talking about joining any of the major film franchises?*

MORGAN: I'm not, but that's obviously the wave of the future. I'm purely locked into *The Walking Dead* at this point. I played Thomas Wayne, a small bit, in *Batman v Superman*, and Zack Snyder and I talked a little about the *Flashpoint* comic where Thomas Wayne is Batman and is a really dark dude. DC has a lot on its plate right now with all the spin-offs, but that's a character I would relish playing.

Q19: *Are you signed to play Negan beyond this season?*

MORGAN: Yeah, I'll be around for a little while. Negan is introduced in issue 100 in the comics, and he's still in it some 50 issues later. If we keep going at this rate, and if they follow the comic book, that could be three or four seasons. We haven't had a lot of conversations about what's ahead, but the show is in a rare position. Unless the audience just totally says "F*ck off", I think we'll be around for a while longer. I can honestly tell you—this is no bullshit at all—it's the most fun I've ever had. It's also the biggest challenge I've ever had. There's no sleepwalking through this character.

Q20: *Do you want to be 70 years old and still going to Comic Con for The Walking Dead?*

MORGAN: Oh hell yes. What I do for a living is to put myself out there and hope people enjoy my work. The ones who enjoy the work are the ones who go to the conventions, and it's important to interact with fans. I've heard so many stories of people being sick and binge-watching a show or relating to a character, and you meet people and realise it can be a life-changing moment to meet you. It's a profound thing. It can be very emotional. ■



TV

ONE SMALL STEP FOR STAND-UP

Reggie Watts and the diverse, digital and beautifully weird new age of comedy

"We here at Netflix believe F*ck T", Reggie Watts tells the crowd with a smile. "We're moving into the future. This is an experimental show. You might not even see this on Netflix. This is an incubator R&D program designed to test the limits of what a viewer can stand."

Those who know the comedian from his stream-of-consciousness stand-up, his meta-hysterical TED Talk or his bandleader gig on *The Late Late Show* will tell you that this moment, from his new special, is just Reggie being Reggie. But no matter how far out there he gets, Watts always has a point, and that Netflix

line is no exception. The past few years have found the streaming service drastically increasing its output of original stand-up specials — testing the limits of how much stand-up a viewer can stand. Clearly we haven't hit one yet.

Watts's special, *Spatial*, is his latest entry in what *The Wall Street Journal* has called "the new comedy economy", a recent surge in the form's evolution led by a handful of streaming services. In August 2016, Netflix announced Watts's special along with seven others, from bigwigs including Dana Carvey and Cedric the Entertainer to fresh faces like Michael Che

To date, Netflix has produced 43 of its own comedy specials — 19 in 2016 alone. Nearly triple that number of non-Netflix-produced specials are currently available for streaming through the USA version of the service. Meanwhile, Comedy Dynamics, America's largest independent stand-up comedy producer, has seen its own number jump several times in the past few years, from seven specials in 2006 to 51 in 2016.

"There's a story I like to tell", says Comedy Dynamics President and founder Brian Volk-Weiss. "At the end of 2015, we had a companywide meeting. I told the company that the year was an anomaly and we would never make that many specials again. Sure

By **BRIAN HEATER**



enough, I looked like an idiot, because this year we produced about 35 percent more.”

You could call it a second golden age for recorded stand-up, a return of sorts to the glory days of the 1980s, when Robin Williams, Eddie Murphy and Comic Relief specials populated screens both big and small. But back then there was no YouTube.

That medium, so widely bemoaned by comedians as a joke burner, has actually reignited interest in the genre. When comedy is served up in free, joke-length portions, it's much easier to discover new voices without having to pay for cable or wade through hour-long specials. And more content means more power to underrepresented artists and communities.

“As long as it means more access to more unique voices that are talking about their experience in comedy, I say the more the better,” says comedian Patton Oswalt, whose first Netflix special, *Talking for Clapping*, arrived in April 2016. “It makes the world feel more connected and way less scary and lonely if there are more people talking about different experiences and making them something everyone can relate to.”

No one embodies this breaking of barriers like Watts, one of the most idiosyncratic and innovative comic performers working today. “I think he’s brilliant,” Oswalt says. “He’s a unique voice. He takes what has become common grammar and really tweaks it to his own sensibility. That’s the sign of a great comedian.”

For its part, Netflix seems to have taken a page out of HBO’s stand-up playbook by giving performers a platform to be themselves. And without the bureaucratic baggage of traditional networks, Netflix is better equipped to take on a project as flat-out weird as *Spatial*. The show opens with the words “Somewhere in the Vega star system” and unfolds into a mélange of free-form improvised musical comedy, absurdist sitcom sketches, colorful costume changes and a shadowy striptease. Watts presides over much of the entropic proceedings in a T-shirt bearing the words *chaotic good* in big block letters — the perfect two-word distillation of Watts’s genius.

“In a way, Netflix is thinking like an artist,” Watts says, referring to its rapid development pace. “They’re able to keep their

minds in a more creative space and kind of go for it, and they’re being rewarded for that.”

It might just be the ideal platform for the comedian, whose work is typically a combination of telepathic wordplay and complex comedic musical improvisations created live on stage with a sampler. “Pretty much the whole special is improvised,” Watts says. “They were able to make that happen. And I think in that format, given the constraints we had, we were able to achieve quite a bit of what I wanted to have happen and also some really nice surprises.”

But just as all the chaotic good of *Spatial* boils down to Watts’s extraordinary voice, body and brain, stand-up has remained remarkably consistent even as distribution methods and attention spans have shifted. Sketches, costumes and interpretive dancing aside, Watts is just a person speaking to an audience.

“Stand-up is about the material and the delivery,” says Volk-Weiss. “What worked in 1950 you can’t really improve too much. Comedy is a lot more diverse than it was, which is a great thing, but you can’t really beat a man or a woman delivering jokes with a microphone.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUTUMN DE WILDE





Diana Sheikhova

Photography by **MATT PLUZ** Text by **JASON FLEETWOOD**

DS

About me

I was born and raised in Moscow Russia. At the age 18 I started studying linguistics at Moscow State Regional university however I moved to the USA after my first year at school to pursue my life long dream of acting and modeling. I now reside in New York although I'm traveling a lot all over the east coast.

Diana entered 2017 in Miami Florida USA and headed to Los Angeles in May. She attended Stella Adler acting studio and took some accent reduction classes and plans to continue her studies in California.













INTERVIEW

MICHAEL HAYDEN

In the days after Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked and crashed four commercial jetliners on September 11, 2001, American President George W Bush ordered the National Security Agency to eavesdrop, without warrants, on American citizens and foreign nationals within the United States. His action represented the biggest shift in US intelligence gathering in American history. But the true architect of that secret program, code named Stellarwind, was a former Air Force intelligence officer who'd been picked to run the NSA two years earlier: General Michael Vincent Hayden. What a long way from Pittsburgh, where Hayden was born in 1945. His youth was western Pennsylvania through and through: Dad was a welder, and the family lived for Sundays, when they would attend mass and Steelers games.

In college at Duquesne University, Hayden even worked at the Steelers' summer training camp to help pay his tuition. He studied history, joined ROTC and started active duty in the Air Force in 1969.

A registered Independent with no political background, Hayden came up through the ranks of Air Force intelligence, and in 1999 President Bill Clinton selected him to run that secretive organisation nicknamed No Such Agency. When Hayden arrived, he found the NSA struggling to keep up with the technological tide. Two years later, 9/11 jolted him into unprecedented action, and he implemented rapid, transformational measures. Hayden's Stellarwind program circumvented the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court and even went beyond the authority of the Patriot Act passed by Congress.

After *The New York Times* exposed the operation in 2005, Hayden still moved forward — but another, more damaging exposure lay ahead. Bush made him Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence and then promoted him to Director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 2006. Hayden's new position as top spy coincided with another CIA hire: Edward

Snowden. The then 23-year-old computer tech later went to work for two NSA contractors, and in 2013 Snowden released confidential information on the spy program established by Hayden. The resulting firestorm implicated both the Bush and Obama administrations.

Today, Hayden is a principal at a security-consulting firm in Washington, DC run by former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff. Hayden's book *Playing to the Edge: American Intelligence in the Age of Terror* was published this February. At 71, he remains an influential figure in the nation's capital. But outside DC, to many he personifies a government that violates individual liberties.

To interview Hayden, PLAYBOY sent political columnist John Meroney. "Hayden is remarkable in his willingness to answer questions about being a spy", Meroney says. "It's striking for someone whose life has been so animated by secrets. We would meet at his office near the White House, with a stunning view of the capital city. He always seems to be on the go, drinking his diet coke and running to catch a plane or teach a class at George Mason University. Still, he remains affable and not at all like most top Washingtonians, whose

every word seems calibrated for maximum public appeal.

"In August, Hayden announced to great media fanfare that he refused to support the candidacy of GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump, arguing that Trump would 'risk our country's national security and well-being'. I wanted to understand what was behind Hayden's stance, so we started our discussion there."

PLAYBOY: Your position is that Trump's statements on the campaign trail disqualify him from being president. Why doesn't Hillary Clinton's handling of classified information disqualify her?

HAYDEN: Because many of the things Trump says appear to be intentional and directed. What Clinton did may reflect incompetence and carelessness, but she's not Edward Snowden.

PLAYBOY: In your letter against Trump, you state that he's ignorant on foreign policy. But many presidents came into office ignorant of foreign affairs, including George W Bush, under whom you served the longest. Isn't there a learning process they all have to go through?

Interview by **JOHN MERONEY** Photography by **ALDO ROSSI**





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HAYDEN: Yes, and that applies to the current president as well. But Barack Obama and George W. Bush had the good sense not to shoot off their mouths with half-assed, uninformed remarks that defy law, logic and reality. Earlier this year I went on *Real Time With Bill Maher*, and he asked me about Trump's statement that the US should kill terrorists' families. I said, "That's just not going to happen. The armed forces of the United States will not carry out such an order." Well, the next week there was a Republican presidential debate, and Bret Bauer of Fox News said, "Michael Hayden said armed forces aren't going to kill women and children for you." Trump responded, "Yes they will, because I'm a leader, a great leader." And then he added, "On 9/11, the terrorists' families knew about the attacks. They left the country before the attacks. They flew out of here, and they watched the planes fly into those buildings on television." That's absolute and total bullshit. Most of those attackers weren't married, none of their families were in the United States, and we have no evidence that any relatives were watching the attacks on TV. Trump just made that up, which is a little different from George W. Bush not knowing the name of the president of Nigeria.

PLAYBOY: Are you opposed to Trump because he repudiates Bush's foreign policy in the Middle East every chance he gets?

HAYDEN: The day after I said I wouldn't support Trump, he said that the people who signed the letter were the same people who brought us the war in Iraq and the rise of ISIS and allowed Americans to die in Benghazi. Trump's answer underscores why we wrote the letter. Yeah, we were all there for Iraq, and we'll take our lumps. History will judge. But none of us was in office for the rise of ISIS, as he claimed. Most of us have been out of government for eight years, so we had nothing to do with Benghazi. What we got from Donald Trump was a non-fact-based, emotional response condemning the character of the people who wrote the letter. That's classic Trump. With Trump, you get free association. I don't see coherence, and that's scary. Regarding ISIS, he says, "We're going to finish them hard, we're going to finish them fast, and then

we're coming home. We're not going to do any of that nation-building shit." Well, if we could kill our way out of this, we'd have been done 15 years ago. The only way out of it is to change the facts on the ground. A high peak of violence followed by disengagement, as he advocates, simply means you get to do it again.

PLAYBOY: Trump says he favours waterboarding as a technique to fight terrorism, and you've stated that waterboarding led to valuable intelligence. How are your views different?

HAYDEN: Well, Trump says he's for waterboarding and "a lot more." When I was in office, we never talked about "a lot more." He

Any security service worth its salt would've discovered where Secretary Clinton's server was.

also says, "We're going to waterboard because they deserve it." We never did it because terrorists deserved it. He's advocating waterboarding as punishment for past sins. He's doing it with enthusiasm. He seems to want to do it, a lot. We did it because we thought people were withholding lifesaving information. We did it with regret, and rarely. To me, those are big differences. Beyond that, we did it when the Department of Justice said it was lawful. Congress has spoken, American law has changed, and we've taken waterboarding off the table. If a future president wants to do it, he'd better bring his own bucket.

PLAYBOY: During the Cold War, the left wing seldom criticised the then Soviet Union even though it was bent on world domination. Now, with the collapse of Soviet communism and Vladimir Putin's rise to power, Hillary Clinton and the Democrats are forceful in denouncing Russia and Putin. How do you ex-

plain the switch?

HAYDEN: Secretary Clinton was for Russia before she was against it.

PLAYBOY: What's wrong with enlisting Russia in the fight against ISIS, as Trump advocates?

HAYDEN: He says, "If you're willing to fight radical Islam with us, you're our friend." He's made fighting ISIS the core around which all other aspects of American diplomacy will form. That position says Russia's my friend because it's willing to kill ISIS too. Well, as long as the Alawites rule in Syria, there will be a Sunni rebellion. And as long as there's a Sunni rebellion, that rebellion and the civil

war will feed fundamentalist Islam.

But a core tenet of Russia's participation in the war is the preservation of, if not Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, then the preservation of Assadism, or Alawite rule. Because Trump oversimplifies, we're in league with a country whose policy guarantees ISIS will never go away.

PLAYBOY: Don't you think Russia is a natural ally of the US?

HAYDEN: No. Russia is using its military power to sustain the Assad regime and not fight ISIS. The Russian air strikes against ISIS have been few and far between. While Russia has gone against the opposition, which includes al-Nusra, the former Al Qaeda group, that's all about expanding government

control, not taking on the global terrorist unit there. So I don't see a convergence of views between the US and Russia, except in a modest tactical sense.

PLAYBOY: All signs indicate that the Russians hacked the Democratic National Committee this summer and subsequently released the documents on WikiLeaks. Why hasn't the US government confirmed it?

HAYDEN: I have no reason to doubt the general consensus that the hack was done on behalf of the Russian Federation, though it was probably done by a Russian criminal gang on behalf of the government. That's a pattern we've seen in Estonia, Georgia and Ukraine.

PLAYBOY: With that kind of certainty, why hasn't President Obama rebuked the Russians for the hack?

HAYDEN: Because the next logical question would be "What are you going to do about it?" Lacking that answer, we choose silence.



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PLAYBOY: Which should be more of a concern. Russians hacking the US election results or Russians mounting a covert influence campaign to coincide with the election?

HAYDEN: Hacking an American political party is a legitimate act of foreign intelligence gathering by the Russians. We would have done the same against a comparable target. But the Russians did more. They weaponised the information. They used the information to meddle in or at least cause us to lose confidence in the American political process. That's called covert influence in the business, and it is quite different from routine espionage.

PLAYBOY: That sounds like Cold War stuff.

HAYDEN: Yeah, and this is not the former Director of the CIA claiming that my agency never in history tried to influence a foreign election. But it's very dangerous.

PLAYBOY: You've been in the top echelon of Washington for decades. From that vantage point, how have the Clintons been able to survive one scandal after another?

HAYDEN: They've shown real talent. They're a very able couple in politics and policy. As senator, Hillary Clinton got good marks from both sides of the aisle for being hardworking and knowledgeable. In the transition from Bush to Obama, I briefed Obama and his top people on ongoing covert actions, and it was clear to me Secretary Clinton was the smartest and most well-informed of the bunch.

PLAYBOY: Given that, and your objections to Trump, why do you refuse to vote for her?

HAYDEN: I wonder what she was thinking when she set up her e-mail system. For someone with my background, what she did is inconceivable. Anybody who has experience at this level of government knows that once you've set it up as she did, it's all bad. It's bad on the preservation of federal records, bad on mingling things you want to keep private as opposed to the secret stuff, and bad with things that shouldn't be in there bleeding into an unclassified e-mail account. When she used her own e-mail and server, she became responsible for the protection of the data. So there's a big question of her competence. She knew she was going to run for president, so who would

even get close to the kinds of arrangements she had, even if they technically stayed on the right side of the law? And I will tell you, every subsequent explanation she gave was incoherent.

PLAYBOY: Do you think other governments were reading her e-mails when she was Secretary of State?

HAYDEN: I do not know that. But any security service worth its salt would've discovered where Secretary Clinton's server was, and any security service that could have, would have broken in. Let me turn this on its head. If a foreign minister in a country important to the United States, particularly one perhaps not

in high school in October 1962 and all of us lined up for confession during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I grew up Catholic and I accepted the Manichaean view of the world. The church was in strong opposition to communism because the Soviets were against freedom of religion. Practically every aspect of my life was "Communism is bad, communism is a danger, communism is a threat." Later, when I was on active duty in 1973, the US went to DEFCON 3 because we weren't sure what kind of weapons the Soviets were shipping to the Egyptians as the Israeli army was crossing the Suez Canal. So I've seen the world more dangerous than it is now.

PLAYBOY: When you were growing up, did you ever fantasise about running the CIA?

HAYDEN: Oh God no. Hell, I was 18 before I got on an aeroplane. I lived in Pittsburgh - you know where Pittsburgh is, right? It's tucked in the south-west corner of Pennsylvania. I joined the ROTC because there was a big war on and we had universal military service. And I was in a neighbourhood where everybody joined.

PLAYBOY: For many, the CIA means Jason Bourne, Jack Bauer, Jack Ryan and Homeland. Do these Hollywood depictions ring true?

HAYDEN: When you go into the headquarters, you walk over the iconic shield, and that image is featured in the movies and on TV. Homeland gets all the foreground wrong, though. My wife and I were watching it the other day and she almost guffawed when the Saul Berenson character, played by Mandy Patinkin, pulls out a cell phone in the agency head-

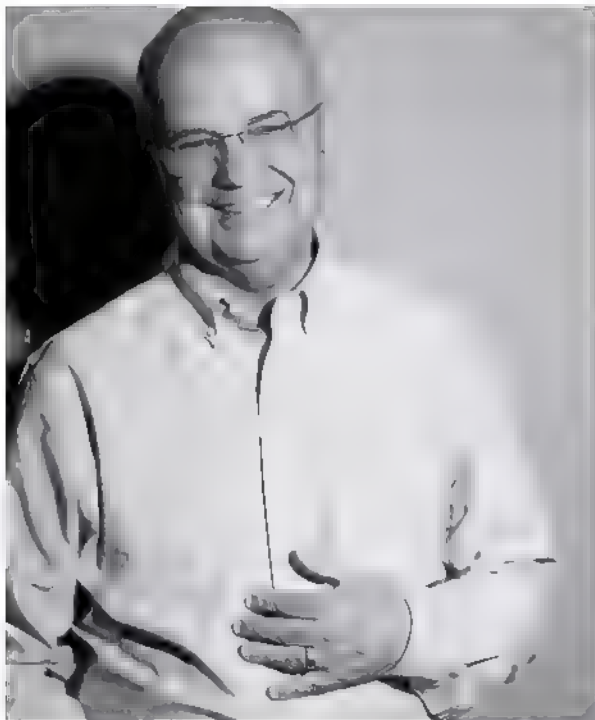
quarters. Oh yeah, that's going to happen. But what *Homeland* does get right is all the stuff in the background. The inward turning, the sisterhood/brotherhood, the focus bordering on obsession.

PLAYBOY: On *Homeland*, CIA officer Carrie Mathison, played by Claire Danes, sometimes uses sex to recruit a source or an agent.

HAYDEN: That would not be acceptable.

PLAYBOY: Would a CIA officer be terminated for using sex?

HAYDEN: Yeah. We have an acronym,



friendly to the United States, had done what she did, I would've been all over them as Director of the NSA.

PLAYBOY: One more Russia question. You were born in 1945, so you must remember the "duck and cover" instructional films of the 1950s. They taught American schoolchildren how to "protect" themselves in the event of a nuclear attack. How did the threat posed by the Soviets affect you?

HAYDEN: It was damn dark. One of my strongest memories was when I was a junior



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MICE, which stands for the tools we can use money, ideology, coercion or compromise and ego or excitement.

PLAYBOY: You said you had a Manichaean, black-and-white view when you were young. Is it fair to say that being a spy changed you?

HAYDEN: No one can be a good intelligence officer and have that black-and-white view of the universe. You begin to see humanity in every aspect of life. I've sat across the table from [Bosnian Serb general] Ratko Mladić. He was an absolute war criminal, but I could still see he was a human being. When I briefed President George W. Bush on Al Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, I made him human. I didn't quench our desire to kill the son of a b*tch, which we did, but I did make him more human.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever killed anyone?

HAYDEN: No, not personally.

PLAYBOY: What was the heaviest burden of being Director of the CIA?

HAYDEN: It's an institution that relies on secrecy for its very success inside a political culture that's distrustful of secrecy. It's a challenge to be successful in espionage and also be true to America's values.

PLAYBOY: That's theoretical. What about the personal burden?

HAYDEN: Well, the phone would ring in the middle of the night, and I generally knew what it was about. I'm not going to describe it any further.

PLAYBOY: Can you tell us how often it rang?

HAYDEN: It was fairly routine. As I reached to grab the phone, I would remind myself: Think this through, you're going to live with this decision for the rest of your life. That's not an invitation to go soft, because if you do and something goes bad, you're going to live with that too.

PLAYBOY: If the CIA is as good as you say it is, why couldn't we stop the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001?

HAYDEN: George Tenet, who was Director of the CIA before I got there, was excited about Al Qaeda and tried to alert the nation, but it was hard to get that kind of message across. "I know this has never happened before, but I got a bunch of guys in the Hindu Kush who I think might be an existential threat

to our well-being as a republic" — that was pretty tough to argue. George also had to cover the waterfront. I mean, the CIA is the nation's *global* espionage service.

PLAYBOY: You'd been Director of the NSA for a little more than two years at that point. Was Osama bin Laden on your radar?

HAYDEN: I was trying to modernize the place to keep track of signals. I wanted to take money off peripheral missions in order to invest in new technology that would intercept modern signals that were changing. God, you would've thought I was telling everybody to make Sophie's choice. Nobody wanted to give up anything. I had to go to the mat to try to reduce NSA's coverage on Nigerian organised

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crime. This sounds like dodging your question, but there was a collective inability to visualise a new kind of threat.

PLAYBOY: But the rise of ISIS, which seems to be a far greater threat than Al Qaeda, has also taken us by surprise in the past couple of years. How did it happen?

HAYDEN: They may have been so busy cutting down trees over here, they just didn't notice the second-growth forest popping up over there. Look, the drumbeat of keeping the nation safe for the next 24 hours has driven most of our analytical energy into so-called targeting. It's all about the disambiguation of data, getting down to the very specific. And that has almost certainly been at the expense of what's going on.

PLAYBOY: What's the future of Iraq?

HAYDEN: Iraq doesn't exist. It's gone, and it's not coming back. Syria doesn't exist either.

PLAYBOY: We can't fix them?

HAYDEN: That's correct. We will never have a unitary political entity called Iraq again, nor will we have one called Syria. Even if we could replace Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Bashar al-Assad with St Francis of Assisi, those places would still be shitty. And they're going to be shitty for a generation or two because Islam is now going through what Christendom went through in the middle of the 17th century with the Thirty Years' War. At the end of that, our monotheism decided, "You know, we've got lots of reasons to kill one another, but let's take religion off the list." We severed state power from theological disputes. It remains to be seen what this great monotheism will do with that question.

PLAYBOY: Even though Iraq and Syria have gone to hell, what's your assessment of whether the CIA and NSA are winning or losing?

HAYDEN: In the war on terror, we were safer four years ago than we are now. ISIS is a bottom-up organisation, whereas Al Qaeda was authoritarian and top-down. So now we're adjusting how to deal with threats coming from ISIS.

PLAYBOY: You use the formulation "war on terror", which George W. Bush started. Why won't you just say that the US is in a war against radical Islam, as Trump and others argue?

HAYDEN: Because that's a bridge too far. This is indeed about Islam — but it's not about *all* of Islam, and it's certainly not about all Muslims. There are multiple civil wars in Islam — a Sunni-Sunni war between the monarchies and ISIS and Al Qaeda, a Sunni-Shia war led by Saudi Arabia and Iran, and then Islam, as one of the world's great monotheisms, trying to make its peace with what you and I call modernity.

PLAYBOY: Let's go back to when you were appointed Director of the NSA in 1999. Did that surprise you?

HAYDEN: Oh yeah. It was just out of the blue, and I'm not a technical guy. George Tenet interviewed me for about an hour, and about four weeks later I was told that the administration was going to send me to Congress for confirmation. I never spoke to the president or the vice president. In fact, as NSA Director my visibility to any president



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happened only after 9/11

PLAYBOY: You've said that before the attacks, the systems at the NSA were so antiquated it was difficult to even send e-mail. Today there's a perception that the NSA is reading every e-mail Americans send. How did we make such a gigantic leap?

HAYDEN: Let's play it back to pre-9/11. I was accused of either being incompetent and going deaf or being omniscient and reading everyone's e-mail. The NSA was having the devil's own time in keeping up with the revolution in modern telecommunications, and I freely admit we were well behind. So that put the lie to this idea that we were reading everybody's correspondence.

PLAYBOY: And 9/11 changed all that?

HAYDEN: Because of the attacks, the NSA got more money and focus and began an aggressive pursuit to be able to read *any* communication—not all, but any. The goal was that no part of the modern global telecommunication structure would offer a safe haven to an enemy of the United States.

PLAYBOY: But didn't that direction lead to us to monitor German Chancellor Angela Merkel's cellphone?

HAYDEN: I can't confirm or deny that we were doing that. But I can tell you that leadership intentions are important. My job was to intercept communications whose acquisition would provide information that made America more free or more safe. This is not about intercepting the communications of just bad people. If you've got a travel agent in Pakistan talking to a travel agent in Kuwait, neither of whom is involved in anything nefarious other than trying to make a buck being a travel agent, but they're talking about the travel of someone we're really interested in, guess what—I'm going to intercept their communications.

PLAYBOY: But Merkel is an ally.

HAYDEN: Yeah, so it's not about the innocent or the not innocent, the guilty or the not guilty.

PLAYBOY: The US just wants to know what these leaders intend to do?

HAYDEN: Leadership intentions are high-priority intelligence targets. Would we collect on all foreign leaders? No. But look, the American culture isn't this kind of fuzzy, amorphous human right to privacy. America is very binary. Are you or are you not protected by the Fourth Amendment? If you are not and your communications contain things that keep America more safe and free and I haven't received political guidance to stand down, game on.

PLAYBOY: But again, Chancellor Merkel is an ally. Can't you see the reason some might be troubled by our listening in on her cell calls?



HAYDEN: Well, if you're offended by it, how about listening in on her predecessor, Gerhard Schröder, who opposed US policy in Iraq? He secured a 1-billion-Euro loan for the Russian gas pipeline Nord Stream right before he left the chancellorship and then was granted a lucrative board position with Nord Stream. You think we ought to be interested in that?

PLAYBOY: So even though you won't confirm that we were listening to Merkel's phone, all governments try to listen to one another.

Did you use a mobile device when you were Director of the NSA or the CIA?

HAYDEN: No. I never had a mobile device until I left government. Period.

PLAYBOY: Why not?

HAYDEN: Because of that very reason. You can't make it work.

PLAYBOY: We can't make a mobile device that's impenetrable?

HAYDEN: You can't make it secure enough. But look around Washington. They're using iPhones and BlackBerrys and they're saying, "I won't use it for any classified work." My message is that the CIA Director's note to his family is of importance to a foreign intelligence service.

Did I have my own e-mail? Sure. It was AOL, and it was on my own computer.

PLAYBOY: What would you use it for?

HAYDEN: Notes to the kids, complaining about the Steelers' offensive line.

PLAYBOY: Did you think foreign governments were reading your e-mail?

HAYDEN: I assumed they were. Let me rephrase that: I had to act as if they were. To do otherwise would've been irresponsible.

PLAYBOY: So we have to accept that everyone is spying on everyone?

HAYDEN: I would lose all respect for a country that didn't take its responsibilities to its citizens seriously enough that it *wouldn't* spy. You may recall that when President Obama was campaigning in 2008, he ran things on his BlackBerry. After he was elected, we told him, "You can't do the BlackBerry here, Mr. President-elect." He gave an interview to

CNBC where he said something that sounded like a Second Amendment bumper sticker: "They're going to have to pry it from my fingers." So we said, "All right, can we borrow it for a day?" And then we kind of tightened it up. I'm telling you this because we were telling the soon-to-be most powerful man in the most powerful nation on Earth that if he used his personal communications device in his own national capital, his e-mails and texts were going to be read by scores of foreign in-



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telligence services. That's just the way things are. Steal my secrets, shame on me. I'll give you one more punch line on Merkel. If the Americans were intercepting her cellphone in Berlin, we were the least of her problems.

PLAYBOY: So where do you see our drive for security going?

HAYDEN: I'm not just a technician. I get it, I vote too. But we carry out the will of the nation, and the nation needs to decide through its political processes how it wants to deal with a new flavour of threat — substate actors, groups and individuals that have the capacity we used to associate only with nation-states. How does the country want to deal with those threats?

PLAYBOY: Two or three weeks after 9/11, as NSA Director you reportedly met with Tenet, and he asked, "Is there anything more you can do?"

HAYDEN: Yes, and I replied, "Not within my authority." He said, "That's not quite what I asked you." I said, "I'll get back to you." So I sat down with my NSA guys and said, "If we had the authority, what are the additional things we could do to make America more safe in these unique circumstances we now find ourselves in?" They came up with two or three things, and I went down and briefed President Bush. He and Attorney General John Ashcroft judged that the president had the authority to authorise them based on his commander-in-chief authorities, and the president acted. The president was willing to authorise things we said no to.

PLAYBOY: Such as?

HAYDEN: We didn't do domestic-to-domestic calls. Actually, I think the president of the United States has the legal authority to do that, but I said to David Addington, the legal counsel to Vice President Dick Cheney, "We don't have the right plumbing for that. And frankly, if we're going to listen in on domestic-to-domestic calls, I'll go to a judge."

PLAYBOY: When Bush gave the green light to the now infamous domestic eavesdropping program, did you think it was legal?

HAYDEN: Yeah. Did I think this would be controversial? God, yeah. Did I recognise there would be a reckoning — if not a legal reckoning, at least a political reckoning? Absolutely. It's a continuous debate that goes

back to Lexington and Concord. The NSA thought it was doing precisely what the American people said they wanted it to do. The so-called 215 program — the metadata program — was directed by two presidents of two different political parties. It was authorised and reauthorised by Congress and overseen by the federal court system.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of 215, also known as the "sensitive collection program", what's your view of Edward Snowden?

HAYDEN: Not very positive.

PLAYBOY: We figured that. The CIA hired him in 2006, around the same time you became Director. He was a high-school dropout. Why

Snowden had other tools available than mass theft and seeking refuge in a totalitarian state.

would the agency hire someone like him?

HAYDEN: Because we needed computer expertise and had been told not to look to traditional moulds for people. If we'd rejected people like Snowden out of hand, we'd be open to even more legitimate criticism. So we brought them all in. He wasn't a star performer when he worked for the agency. Before that, he took some job as a security guard at an NSA facility, then got on with a contractor at Dell and then at Booz Allen Hamilton. But it was just his computer knowledge, which we're all in great need of, that got him on at the CIA.

PLAYBOY: How did the NSA react to news of Snowden's disclosures?

HAYDEN: The general outcry took the NSA off-balance. The NSA was like, "What? What a minute. Congress knows. The President authorised it. The court's overseeing it. That's exactly the way you said we should get permission to do this stuff." The NSA got permission for Section 215 of the Patriot Act, and its strongest

defenders were the two intelligence committees in Congress. What was new is that a lot of Americans — and they didn't have tin foil on their heads — said, "That no longer constitutes consent of the governed. That may be consent of the governors. You may have told them, but you didn't tell us." That's what this is about.

PLAYBOY: Did Snowden disrupt any NSA operations?

HAYDEN: Absolutely.

PLAYBOY: Do you put Snowden in the same category as other Americans convicted of espionage against the US, such as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were stealing nuclear secrets so the Soviets could build a bomb?

HAYDEN: Snowden didn't do it for money, so that separates him from a whole bunch of folks. He didn't do it for the cause of a foreign state, which separates him from the Rosenbergs. He did it for ideology. It was kind of his own — not a competing global ideology in some sense of a cold war. All that said, what he did was the single greatest haemorrhaging of legitimate American secrets in the history of the country.

PLAYBOY: One of the key questions raised by Snowden's revelations seems to be whether our government needs formal power to spy within our country. We didn't really have that before 9/11.

HAYDEN: This is not about the ability to spy on Americans, it's about the erosion of the old distinction between foreign intelligence collection and domestic law enforcement. Things aren't as crisp and clear as they were 50 years ago. If there's an e-mail between Waziristan and Yemen, the odds are pretty good that it's sitting on a server in the United States. Is that American? For some it is. And that used to not be a problem. That correspondence never sat in the United States, and therefore there was never a claim to privacy protection. So what you're seeing is not a desire to spy on Americans. What you're seeing is: How do we continue to do that which we've done in the past in a world in which the distinction between foreign and domestic, law enforcement and intelligence, is not nearly as bright?

PLAYBOY: The stories of Snowden's leaks by Glenn Greenwald in *The Guardian* and the documentary *Citizenfour* by Laura Poitras have been called the greatest journalistic coups since the publication of the Pentagon Papers during Vi-



INTERVIEW

etnam. How do you view Greenwald and Poitras?

HAYDEN: They describe themselves as advocacy journalists, which is different from being a journalist. When they got access to these things, they rolled them out in the darkest way possible in terms of what it was they thought they were describing, and very often they got it wrong. Saying the NSA had free range of the domestic internet service providers' servers — that's simply not true, and a lot of the things that have come out have nothing to do with your privacy or mine. I would call it espionage porn. It's certainly destructive of the capabilities of a free people to collect intelligence and defend itself.

PLAYBOY: But can you understand why Daniel Ellsberg and others see Snowden as a hero?

HAYDEN: They've accepted the premise that what we have here is an all-knowing, all-surveilling surveillance state. This fits into the pre-conceived narrative. The "evidence" Snowden was pushing was reasoned, somewhat measured responses to the world in which we find ourselves. I can't find a civil libertarian who gave a damn when we were trying to cover the Soviet Union's Strategic Rocket Forces.

PLAYBOY: You're going back to the Cold War?

HAYDEN: Yes. There were Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces communications coming out of Moscow and going to the intercontinental-ballistic-missile fields in the Far East. The US was all over that communication channel, trying to pick up words of interest like launch. Today's equivalents are terrorist and proliferator and trafficker communications co-existing with your Gmails. So if you want the NSA to do for you in the 21st century what it did for you in the last half of the 20th, it has to be in those communications paths — even though your communications are skidding by there too.

PLAYBOY: What do you see as Snowden's long-term fate?

HAYDEN: He stays in Moscow. I cannot conceive of a plea deal that would satisfy him and not alienate the 100,000 Americans who go to work every day and keep secrets.

PLAYBOY: What do you make of former attorney general Eric Holder going from criticising Snowden to now saying he performed a

"public service"?

HAYDEN: I was heartened that the Obama administration backed away from Holder's latest statement almost immediately. Snowden engineered the greatest leak of legitimate American secrets in the history of the republic. Whatever debate he may have generated about American metadata, the other 98 percent of what he stole had nothing to do with American privacy. It had everything to do with how America conducts legitimate foreign intelligence. If he ever returns home, the first sound he hears should be "You have the right to remain silent." I don't mean to be an ass about this, but the damage he did will last for a very long time. He had other tools available



to him than mass, near indiscriminate theft and then seeking refuge in a totalitarian state.

PLAYBOY: What's your view of Chelsea Manning, the transgender Army soldier who as Bradley Manning gave documents and other material to WikiLeaks in 2010?

HAYDEN: Manning is different from Snowden because she didn't even know what she was downloading; it was just a data dump. What higher principle was Manning embracing? Seriously. The only crime she claimed to uncover was the video of our Apache helicopter killing two jour-

nalists in Iraq. But that had already been investigated. Manning was an unhappy, frustrated young soldier who appears to have been bullied by her squad and platoon mates. At her trial, she said that what she did was irresponsible.

PLAYBOY: President Obama's term is finished. What's your assessment of him?

HAYDEN: He wanted to expend most of his energies in making America better and viewed much of what the external world was imposing on him as a distraction from that primary task. Unfortunately, the world didn't co-operate and imposed itself on him. And to be honest, it has imposed itself on him in a very punishing way.

PLAYBOY: Why do you think Obama continued some of Bush 43's tactics, such as the section of the Patriot Act that permits the government to search a citizen's records without the citizen's consent?

HAYDEN: Obama ran on an "I'm not George Bush" approach. And what did he do? He kept the part of the Patriot Act you're talking about, which is a pretty good argument that it was probably a pretty useful program. But it's also an argument that national security looks different from the Oval Office than it does from a hotel room in Iowa.

PLAYBOY: Oliver Stone's new movie *Snowden* has an NSA head, possibly a Hayden stand-in, who says, "Most Americans don't want freedom. They want security." How does that characterization square with you?

HAYDEN: Why do the purveyors of this conspiratorial bullshit think they have a right to condemn those who work to keep them safe? Two days after 9/11, I addressed the NSA. I said, "It's not just our safety but our character as a free people that is at stake here. Every nation is required

to balance the needs of security with the needs of liberty. Thanks to James Madison and a bunch of his friends, we have planted our flag well on the side of liberty in that difficult question. But if a nation feels itself threatened, feels its children are at risk, it tends to move its banner closer to the requirements of security than those of liberty. You and I have a role here. You and I can and will preserve American liberty and we will do it by making America feel safe again." I often think of that speech when I hear criticism like that. It doesn't square with the world I lived in. ■

IdiKO . Ferenczi

Photography by **BRIAN B HAYES** *Booked by* **917PR**





Where are you from?

I'm European rooted, raised in the most beautiful city in the world Vancouver, Canada, and presently residing in California, USA, the city of dreams.

What's it like to be considered one of the world's hottest mommas?

We obviously I'm flattered. But most importantly I want to be an example to other mamas out there. There is something that has always bothered me throughout my life. On several occasions I've heard many women say that they have quit, given up on, or stopped a dream that they were pursuing because they got pregnant and had children. Why do dreams have to stop? Why did the greatest gift in life end the greatest dreams in life? Something's not right there. In my opinion, believe we can have it all. Be sexy, successful, great mothers, healthy and fit with a great love. Sure there will be sacrifice and a lot of hard work. But there absolutely is a way to make it all happen. Dreams don't have to end. I watched my mother go after her dreams and she included us in it. I've always planned to do the same thing. I want my son to know that no matter what happens in life any dream is possible. Here I am, juggling it all. It's hectic and crazy at times but I'm making it happen. People assume I have a nanny but I don't. I surprised myself. I thought for sure I would have one. But when the baby came, I didn't trust anyone else to care for him. I decided to do all the things I need to do, as I raised my son the way that I wanted. Do I have time to go out and hang out with the girls not really but I am doing what I love? YES. And my baby boy is right here by my side as I go for it. When my son was just barely 3 months old, I was asked to host and shoot live at the Maxim Hot 100. Everyone around me told me it was impossible and to turn it down. Just like when I was eight months pregnant at the Maxim Super Bowl party, I gratefully accepted on one condition that I could come and go to breastfeed my son. We made it work.

Hold up, we heard about this. Did you say you hosted the Maxim Super Bowl party 8 months pregnant?

Haha yes, I did. My girlfriend said "Maybe you should tell them that you're pregnant." I was like "NO WAY!", I was barely showing and still doing fashion shoots so I jumped at the opportunity. Besides, I already smuggled my 6-month old baby belly that wasn't yet showing to host the Maxim Halloween Event. I even shot bikini. I was 7 months pregnant, I had a little fun with this, to see how long I can keep this little secret going on. It wasn't until finally I decided to share my surprise with my fans at the end of Twitter's periscope summit in New York at 8 and a half months did the public find out. Everyone was shocked at the news as nobody could tell with the way I was dressed and as I sashayed around the event in 6-inch Christian Louboutins. It was all such an awesome experience and I have such great stories to share with my son about breaking the rules.

Okay, we just saw your uber sexy lingerie picture that went viral last year on Instagram shot one day before you had your son. That's crazy. You still had abs, how? You're an Anomaly. Pregnant woman don't look like that!

Actually yes they do. I have many gorgeous friends that look sexy pregnant. Haha. Yeah, it was crazy. I couldn't believe how viral it went. The shoots I did before you can't even really tell that I was pregnant. I looked bloated, not pregnant. So, really I wanted a beautiful baby belly photo for memories sake. We are European so we love to eat. But only Whole Foods organic foods, no junk food. I think that has a huge impact. I was very cautious about everything that went into my mouth if it wasn't healthy and built my baby in a healthy way. I wouldn't eat anything only eat foods that would build my baby's brain, heart, bones, organs, and body in a healthy way. I was very careful to eat all the best foods and the very best vitamins. The abs were from pre-baby. I was an athlete

in the gym before I was pregnant. While I was pregnant, I only walked and did light machines and stretched. In fact, the doctors said I could do a lot more because I was so active before the baby, but as a first-time mom, I was very nervous about working out with the baby. I had two OB/GYNs, one in Canada and one in America, and neither one of them batted an eye. They saw my body before the baby, so everything was completely normal. The baby was incredibly healthy, and so was I. Everyone's body is different, but basically you're going to get what you have before the baby. You know, it's funny but I think I felt the sexiest I've ever felt in my entire life during my pregnancy and after becoming a mom. I also got hit on a lot while I was pregnant. Like a lot, a lot. That was something I definitely did not expect. Maybe it was the hormones. Who knows.

We sure think so, but are you saying you feel sexier as a mom?

Absolutely 1000,000%. Becoming a mother is the best thing that has ever happened to me.

You have such a beautiful and unique name. Does it mean anything?

I get that question a lot. I'diko is a Hungarian name that means fierce warrior/princess. It was also the name of one of Attila. The Huns' wives. If you know me, the name is quite fitting. My life has been quite a journey with several ups and downs, but I refused to throw in the towel and will continue to fight for my dreams and beliefs. Our obstacles are gifts that make us stronger. We should all wear our tragedies as armour, not shackles.

We heard you are 100% natural. Tell us about your choice to stay all natural in a world that is quick to go under the knife.

Yes, it's true. I'm very proud of the fact that I kept my body 100% natural. I never realised how valuable the choice to stay natural was. I was talked out of getting my breasts augmented in my late teens by an agent. Staying natural was the best decision I could have ever made for myself and my film career. Nowadays you can buy perfection, but natural perfection is priceless. Ask any agent, fashion industry professional, even billionaires. They want what money can't buy. Lately, several feature films/blockbusters have set out to cast a natural, perfect on type of look. Natural beauty is becoming a rare thing nowadays. I'm thrilled to be an example for girls and women worldwide to embrace their natural beauty as they strive to be their personal best. It's the mind and personality that the world falls in love with. It's a woman's confidence, the way she carries herself, the way she thinks, the way she looks after her body and health. That, in my opinion, is the sexiest thing about myself and other women.

You are quite famous, with TV and movie experience, how does modelling help your career?

I never set out to become a model. In my early teens, I was convinced by a friend of my mom's to enter a modelling contest. I didn't win, and I was told I was too short and didn't look American enough. The curiosity with modelling ended that day, and I moved on to other things. Modelling came with the film territory after booking some roles. Magazines came knocking, and that's how I received my invitation to the modelling world. Truthfully, modelling does not help my acting career at all. In my experience, film and TV casting is 100% harder on you. If they think you have a modelling career, I found that I had to work so much harder to prove myself in the film industry. I had to grow thick skin and bring a great pair of acting chops to my auditions. I really had to commit to classes, workshops, voice, movement, and personal coaching. I missed so many parties and even my own birthday celebrations because I was so committed to my passion. One of my acting mentors told me to never mention that I modelled and to just leave it completely off my resume, so I did. It's do









and I don't talk about it in "the room". But I have that "it" and bring "it" to the room every time.

How did you get into acting?

I was discovered by a casting director on Robson street. One of the busiest shopping streets in Vancouver. She said I had a look and I was cast as background to see how I would do on set. On set the Director came up to me and asked me if I could do lines. I looked at him wide eyed, my jaw dropped as I told him I wasn't that kind of girl. I tried to explain that I was just skinny because I was a health and fitness freak. He looked at me like I was a weirdo and went to ask the next pretty girl. She shrieked yes. And off they went. After they left a couple girls asked if I was crazy and told me I just blew off an upgrade to an actor role. I didn't know film industry. I thought he was asking me if I did drugs. The next day I signed up for acting classes and the journey began.

We heard you are presently filming a project. Can you tell us a little about it?

Wow. How do you guys even know these things? Yes I am filming something really exciting and I can't wait to share the details with everyone very soon. I still don't have the green light to talk about it publicly. But as soon as I can, I will announce it on my social media platforms or it will come up in the press. Whichever comes first.

Why did you come up with the name spicyLiLpepper for your social media?

Haaaaa I kind of figured that would come up. A few years back my agent suggested that I started up on digital media to share news and become more connected with my fans and supporters. As unique as my name was I quickly learned that my real name had been locked down on the most popular social media platforms. It was happening to so many actors at the time. After someone holding my name hostage tried to charge me thousands of dollars to use my own name I decided to just use something that was easy to spell and remember so my supporters wouldn't have to struggle to find me on social media. I settled on a nickname I was given when I was three years old. I was awarded the name after I hured my plow during a dance performance. As a young perfectionist I was furious that the crowd laughed and clapped as I visibly messed up my Hungarian folk "plover dance" steps. At the end of our show I ran back onto the stage, gave them a look that my mother would never forget and I hured my plow towards the area that laughed the

loudest. The crowd thought it was a part of the act and laughed and clapped even louder. After the performance my mom grabbed me by the shoulders backstage and asked me why I did that? I explained that I worked so hard and they laughed at my mistake. She said they weren't making fun of me. They thought it was cute how I corrected my dance steps. She said They loved it and loved me. That's how the nickname "Eros K's paprika" "@spicy pepper" came to be.

What inspires you?

Quotes. When I was a little girl I had a new friend come over to play. I was trying to play store with her and she only wanted to talk negatively about other little girls from our class. As I repeatedly tried to get her to stop gossiping about friends and rather play business woman with me finally my mom walked into my room and taped a quote to a painting in my room and walked out without saying a word. It said "Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people" by Eleanor Roosevelt. I very quickly learned that you are what you surround yourself with. Needless to say I never played with that little girl again. After that day I took a liking to quotes and started taping quotes to my mirror that were fitting for my situation at hand. Sometimes I needed an extra push to accomplish a goal or sometimes I just wanted to hear the words from someone that had overcome an obstacle that I was facing. Taping quotes to my bathroom mirror became my regular thing. Over the years I've been fascinated by life lessons shared by legends such as Elon Musk, Steve Jobs and Tony Robbins. I love their bios and life stories and find HUGE clues to their success in their quotes. I could spend hours reading quotes by the greatest people that ever lived. Through this I stumbled on a passion project. Recently I teamed up with Dan Caldwell, the founder of the con brand "Tapout" and we created "Bona reCollectibles". This fascinating new journey boasts various autographed items that once belonged to legendary entrepreneurs, athletes and leaders. Their legacy is artistically designed into beautiful one of a kind framed treasures that inspire those who are lucky enough to be surrounded by it. These quotes are life changing. It's a project we love as we see how surrounding yourself with the right influence changes one's life the same way it has changed ours. Check us out on Instagram @Bona reCollectibles or on Twitter @bonareCOLLECT or visit bonarecollectibles.com.

Do you walk around the house in your underwear?

Doesn't everyone?

Do you like, or hate social media?

I love social media. It's such a great way to instantly connect with my supporters and followers worldwide. It was a bit weird when I became the world's most loved broadcaster on Twitter's Periscope app. It was strange to think people all over the world were watching my life live. But truly I've have had so many amazing opportunities just through social media alone. I feel very blessed to have had such an amazing journey and the ability to share the ups, downs and life's surprises. In the end it's all to inspire and motivate. And of course to spread the love worldwide.

Brazilian cut or thongs?

Both. I love to switch it up. It's the naughty and nice in me.

What do you find sexy in men?

First his mind. Always far for nerds and business men that are filled with fountains of valuable business advice. I'm very curious and I love to learn every avenue of business. I've loved for my dear man to have spontaneity, thoughtfulness, drive, creativity, persistence, inner strength and a good sense of humour. But the thing that means the world to me is deep passionate mind stimulating conversation and of course surprises. Here's the thing I've only dated men that I can imagine being my partner in crime to take over the world with. To create a positive impact that will create waves of inspiration that cause everyone around us to be the best that they can be. Whether it's a partner in crime, a best friend or a girlfriend, I only surround myself with people that push, motivate and believe in me. The people you surround yourself with should make you a better version of yourself. That's what's ultimately huge in my books.

Final note

Thank you Playboy for having me. It was a pleasure talking to you guys. I have always loved and admired the strength and success story of the Playboy brand. It's awesome to be a part of the family again. Big hugs, kisses and many blessings to you all. Let's stay connected.

Want to see more of Ildiko? Then visit her website at ildikoferenczi.com or follow her on Twitter and Instagram @spicyLiLpepper or Facebook @spicyLiLpepper1

Nationality European

Date of birth June 10th

Weight 45kg

Height 168cm





BOOKS

The Next Sexual Revolution

*Orgasmic meditation. Webcans. Nonmonogamy. Emily Witt explores these worlds and more in her book **Future Sex**, an eye opening survey of the ways we come together and get off in the 21st century. The Brooklyn based author spoke with us about the big questions we'll be asking ourselves as we enter the post Tinder phase of the sexual revolution and made a few guesses as to the pleasures and trials we'll encounter. All of us — especially straight men — should take heed.*



FUTURE SEX

IDENTITY

"We have this idea of coming out for gay people or queer people, and straight people tend to think they don't have to go through that process of inquiry because society offers so much consensus about who they are and what their relationships will look like, but it's beneficial to everybody to examine your fantasies — where they came from, what informed them and whether they're really rooted in your physical feelings."

COURTSHIP

"People will always want romance. We can't all be like, 'Let's meet at a bar and then go home together.' That's fine, but I think there will still be a place where charm matters. That's what Playboy will be showing people how to do — the futuristic equivalent of how to make a good martini. Everybody still values manners, humour, creativity and all the gestures that make an encounter with a new person fun and extraordinary."

SEX

"With straight men, there can be a video game-like rubric of sexual achievement: 'I need to press this button and reach this level and then I've won the game.' If you're on the other side of that, it may not be the maximum version of your pleasure. You feel the person is not actually paying attention to your responses. Everybody, male and female, has to go through a process of finding an authentic sexual self outside of porn."

RELATIONSHIPS

"There's a machine bias in futurism. People tend to think of the future of sexuality as virtual-reality porn and tele-dildo'nes, but actually it's much less glossy and robotic. It's much more about how you define a family if you never get married or have kids. How do you take care of elderly people? When you change the way you organise your sexual relationships in a society, the whole structure of that society changes."

COMMITMENT

"I'm searching for some kind of commitment that incorporates the new technology we have and the openness of our social mores but allows us to build sustainable relationships and keep one another safe and happy. For some people, the answer will still be marriage. Thousands of years of history have perfected this structure, and maybe it's still the best one, but I think there's something better out there."



POLITICS

NO HOME FOR WAR HAWKS

How Trump silenced the Republican call for war

Even if Donald Trump lost, his insurgent campaign for the White House will have accomplished something remarkable: running the hawks out of the Republican Party. Until Trump came along, this small but potent band of scholars, commentators and ex-government officials controlled GOP foreign policy for more than two decades, steering the US into a disastrous invasion of Iraq.

The group formed after voters swept Bill Clinton into the presidency in 1992. William Kristol, who had served as Vice President Dan Quayle's Chief of Staff under George H.W. Bush, was suddenly out of a job. Around Washington, Kristol was known as "Dan Quayle's brain", which no doubt limited his prospects. So he teamed with former Department of State speech writer Robert Kagan, and together they dreamed up an audacious stunt: Urge Clinton to go to war against Iraq.

Calling themselves the Project for the New American Century, Kristol and Kagan convinced 23 former government officials, including three ex-Cabinet members—former Secretary of Education William Bennett and former Secretaries of Defense Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld—to sign PNAC's statement of principles to "challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values". Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein topped their list.

President Clinton ignored them, and they were left waiting for a president to influence. By 2000, the hawks saw Governor George W. Bush of Texas as their mark. But there was a problem: Bush campaigned by arguing for a "humble" US foreign policy. "I'm not so sure the role of the United States is to go around the world and say, 'This is the way it's got to be'", Bush argued. This position flew in the face of the hawks' interventionist agenda.

Then Bush put Cheney in charge of selecting his Vice President, and Cheney selected himself



By **JOHN MERONEY**

After they won, the Bush-Cheney team reinstated Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense (the position he'd held during Gerald R. Ford's presidency) and let about a dozen other hawks into the White House. After 9/11, the hawks finally had the momentum they needed for a Middle East invasion. Bush's then Secretary of State, Colin Powell, warned against an invasion, not only because Iraq had never attacked the United States but also because Powell feared what he called his Pottery Barn rule: You break it, you own it.

"You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people. You will own all their hopes, aspirations and problems. You'll own it all", Powell told Bush.

It's been almost 15 years since the hawks got their war, and Powell's warning still rings true. That hasn't stopped the hawks from holding sway in GOP circles. A year ago they had Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio advocating for more overseas adventures. All that ended with Trump.

"Obviously, the war in Iraq was a big fat mistake", Trump said in one of the GOP debates. "Bush made a mistake. We can make mistakes,

but that one was a beauty. We have destabilised the Middle East." Later, in an interview with *The New York Times*, he added, "If our presidents would have just gone to the beach and enjoyed the ocean and the sun, we would've been much better off in the Middle East."

For the neoconservatives, this was heresy. That the message got traction with voters made them apoplectic. Leading neocon Peter Wehner charged in *The New York Times* that Trump is "erratic" and "unprincipled" and "possesses a streak of crudity and cruelty."

"Those objections are just a camouflage for deep policy differences", says Faith Whittlesey, a senior advisor and US Ambassador in Ronald Reagan's White House, and a Trump supporter. "The [hawks] are Brahmins in the imperial city of DC, and their policies reigned supreme. Trump comes along and challenges their basic assumptions, and they don't want that."

They also realise voters have no taste for new wars. "The old idea of going in and turning Iraq or Afghanistan into some version of Iowa—the American people won't go for it anymore", says conservative commentator Patrick Buchanan. "They're going to have a hellish time making their case for future interventions."

Now that Trump has won, the hawks face a total shutout. "They're going to have zero influence in the Trump administration—zero", is how one of his advisors puts it. "The neocons are going to be persona non grata."

In early September 2016, there was talk of a potential resurgence should the presidency go to Hillary Clinton, who voted for the Iraq war. But when Clinton declared on NBC's Commander-in-Chief Forum, "We are not putting ground troops into Iraq ever again, and we're not putting ground troops into Syria. We're going to defeat ISIS without committing American ground troops", the lights dimmed at neocon central. ■



COLUMN

FRANCOFILE

Talking acid, acting and the future of the Wu Tang Clan with hip hop legend Method Man

FRANCO: What got you into hip-hop?

METHOD MAN: I've always been into hip-hop but not particularly writing and rhyming. It was the dudes I hung around. That's why I always say it's important to know who your kids are hanging around, because that's going to be a greater influence than anything else. I could have hung out with dudes that was crackheads, and I could have been a crackhead. But I hung out with dudes that liked to rhyme.

FRANCO: One of those dudes was RZA. How did you meet?

METHOD MAN: I met RZA between the eighth and ninth grades. He was already a bit of a celebrity. They had tapes that would circulate through the hoods. This is when Slick Rick was big with these story rhymes, and RZA had a gang of story rhymes. I wanted to meet the dude, and a friend of mine brought me to RZA's house one day. It was just a friendship from there on.

FRANCO: You're in ninth grade and rhyming with friends. What does that look like?

METHOD MAN: Let's put it this way: There was a lot of truancy going on, you know what I'm saying? We would meet up at the bus stop on our way to school, and dudes got money in their pockets. It was \$5 for a ravioli bag. That's slang for a \$5 sack of weed that came in a big yellow envelope. We would all put our money together, then we'd go up in the staircase and just be rhyming all day off that one bag of weed. Our building only went up to the sixth floor and then you had the roof, so we would rhyme in between the sixth floor and the roof because it had a lot of bass in there.

FRANCO: If that's where you were putting all your energy, what was high school like for you?

METHOD MAN: Well, as I told you, there was a lot of truancy going on. I'm a smart guy. I've always been a great student, but I wasn't interested in school anymore. I would just leave. Plus, I was smoking mad marijuana, and then we discovered acid. Oh boy.



By **JAMES FRANCO**

FRANCO: When did Wu-Tang start?

METHOD MAN: Wu-Tang was supposed to be RZA, GZA and Ol' Dirty Bastard, just those three. We all did a song together that was supposed to be a posse cut — you know, one of those songs where you put all your friends on it. But when we recorded it, RZA thought, Damn, I got a lot of dope niggas in my home right now. He had an epiphany: I might as well come in as a group with all these dudes. I don't know how GZA and Dirty felt about it, but that's a little Wu-Tang trivia. But we all had to pay to get on that song. Studio time was expensive and none of us had money, but it was \$100 a head to get into the studio and get on that record. Afterwards, I remember RZA coming to talk to me about the whole Wu-Tang thing and what he had planned.

FRANCO: How do you decide who gets a verse on a Wu-Tang track?

METHOD MAN: Everybody gets a shot at the track. If you show, you go. If the verses are not up to par, when you hear the album, your verse

ain't on there. I never had that problem, though. I always made sure I went in. And certain songs just sounded good the way they were, like "C.R.E.A.M." with Inspectah Deck and Rakwon. You didn't want to touch them because they felt genuine the way they were.

FRANCO: How did you make the move into acting?

METHOD MAN: They wanted me to perform one of my songs in a movie called *The Great White Hype*. Sam Jackson was there, and Damon Wayans too. Sam was doing a movie called *One Eight Seven*, and they called me in to do a little part. Once I did that, I was hooked. The first audition I went on was for a movie called *Cop Land*, and I went in and it was horrible. My manager told me to go back in with the whole "Bring the Pain" look — the eyeball missing, the whole thing. So I went back in with my getup on, and I got the part. From there, it was on, but there weren't a lot of roles for rappers — unless you were like

freaking Will Smith. Redman and I decided the only way we were going to get into the game was if we made our own movie. That's when I met my manager, and she gave us the opportunity to make *How High*. We were so green. Watch *How High* now; you can see every time we walk into a room, we're looking down because we were looking for our marks.

FRANCO: Is Wu-Tang still recording?

METHOD MAN: Not right now. I'm doing my thing with acting. RZA's directing. We gave it one last shot on this latest LP, but you know, it wasn't received well by the fans. And some of the Clan members didn't like it either — the way it was done, the process and all that. For me, if you don't love what you're doing anymore, it's time to leave that shit the f*ck alone. But you know, dudes in the Clan still have that itch, and I'm a team player, so if they want to go back and make another album, as many albums as they want to make, I'm here for it. ■

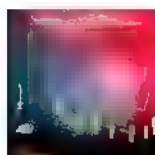
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE MA



MUSIC

Noises From the Underground

Five indie bands fearlessly tackle personal travails and divergent styles, offering albums that aim for both the heart and the gut



CYMBALS EAT GUITARS

Pretty Years
Sinderlyn

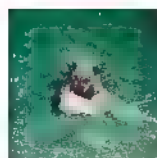
If you want a crash course in the fractured genius of Cymbals Eat Guitars (pictured), check out “4th of July, Philadelphia (SANDY)”, the lead single from their fourth album, *Pretty Years*. Frontman Joseph D’Agostino sings about a holiday party that gets out of hand before it even starts; three and a half minutes later, a guy takes a bat to the head. D’Agostino walks away unscathed, feeling better for the first time in months—at least for a little while (“Swore I’d be present and grateful for every second / Later the feeling faded / I couldn’t help it”). Then there’s the song’s title, which references both Bruce Springsteen’s “4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)” and bedroom strummer Alex G, a Philly native who’s name-checked in the lyrics and often goes by SANDY. Like Japan droids and Titus Andronicus, Cymbals Eat Guitars have one foot in internet-bred indie rock and the other in plain old rawk rock, combining the swagger of the second with the dark introspection of the first. And though their lyrics present a world full of disappointment, pain and anger, the songs glow with the underlying hope that you can always pull yourself out of the muck and reconnect. The US-based New Jersey group had a creative breakthrough with 2014’s *LOSE*, which saw D’Agostino come to terms with the death of his best friend atop mountain-size guitar outbursts, and they continue to ride that high on *Pretty Years*. Amid the feedback bombs, they also made room for “Have a Heart”, a jubilant New Wave love song that should be sound-tracking bat-free parties for years to come.



BEACH SLANG

A Loud Bash of Teenage Feelings
Polyvinyl

Following the release last fall of Beach Slang’s clamorous debut album, *The Things We Do to Find People Who Feel Like Us*, singer James Alex had so many feelings inside that the Philly-based outfit had to issue a follow-up right away. Inspired by conversations between Alex and fans young and old, *A Loud Bash of Teenage Feelings* takes the “like the first album but more so” approach, piling on power chords, nicotine-scorched vocals and a gift for evoking timeless teen angst.



JOYCE MANOR

Cody
Epitaph

Known for making albums shorter than a sitcom episode, California punks Joyce Manor worked on this one with Beck producer Rob Schnapf for a full two months. Lest anyone worry that these eternal little brothers are getting too mature, “Stars” finds singer Barry Johnson admitting he still lives with his parents and is incapable of doing the dishes or laundry. So not the best housemates, but Joyce Manor can still shove a summer’s worth of hooks and pathos into a two-minute pop gem.



TOUCHÉ AMORÉ

Stage Four
Epitaph

Touché Amoré has shown serious ambition since forming nearly a decade ago, but on its fourth album, the California hardcore outfit tackles the small matter of life and death itself. *Stage Four* is a song cycle about frontman Jeremy Bolm losing his mother to a drawn-out battle with cancer and his struggle to find the good in the world (“I asked your God how could you? / But never got an answer”). The intricate songwriting and white-knuckle tempos make for a life-affirming listen.



WARPAINT

Heads Up
Rough Trade/Reprise
Control

The nice thing about goth is that it’s timeless. But that doesn’t mean it can’t use an upgrade every so often, and on its third album, LA quartet Warpaint mashes up New Order–style bass figures and synth lines with tricky drumbeats inspired by West Coast hip-hop (there’s even a song named “Dre”) and woozy R&B production. Through it all, Warpaint never strays from its most powerful element: the exquisitely unimpressed harmonies of its three vocalists. Michael Tedder

The

Mexico's beauty-pageant circuit is a place for

Beauties

women to be discovered by talent scouts and

of

drug cartels. Playboy travels to the land of El

Sinaloa

Chapo to witness the hope and the danger

PHOTOGRAPH BY **OLIVIA JAFFE**





"Silencio, por favor."

The chattering audience in the bleachers at Televisoras Grupo Pacifico's Culiacán soundstage is causing programming director Francisco Arce Camarena a great deal of stress. It's 9:30AM on a Tuesday in late May, and filming of a casting for the northwestern Mexican state of Sinaloa's most prominent annual beauty pageant needs to

By **JESSICA P. OGILVIE**

get under way. Behind Arce Camarena, 16 young women pose in an arc, delicately positioned on an ivory set with the letters NB, for *Nuestra Belleza* ("Our Beauty"), written in pink cursive. So stunning that they look like onyx-haired Barbies come to life, the women have their hands on their outer hips, their front-facing knees gently bent and smiles twitching on their angel-like faces. In accordance with pageant requirements, they're all between 18 and 24, 1.65m or taller and at least conversant in English. They've arrived from all across the state. Those who make the cut today will go on to compete in *Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa*, whose winner will be in the running for *Nuestra Belleza Mexico*, which funnels its titleholder to Miss Universe—one of the largest beauty pageants in the world. This morning, the women stand beneath glancing television lights, in front of a now-silent audience full of their hopeful families and friends, waiting to be evaluated. But once today's casting airs, the judges won't be the only ones watching. The women will be seen by all of Mexico, including the region's richest and most dangerous men—members of the Sinaloa cartel. Widely believed to be one of the most powerful drug-trafficking organizations in the Western hemisphere, the cartel is among the largest suppliers of heroin, meth, marijuana and cocaine to the US. Its leader, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, is reportedly worth \$1 billion. He made international headlines the past few years for being captured, escaping from prison through a tunnel, scurrying off on a motorcycle, giving an interview to Sean Penn and then being captured again just a few months later.

For decades, men like El Chapo have courted pageant queens with money and gifts, pursuing them as aggressively as real estate moguls chasing a hot piece of property in LA or New York. Some women fend them off, wary of the violence of narco life. Others compete in pageants with the explicit goal of meeting rich but potentially dangerous men, weighing the risk against the chance to lift themselves and their families out of the poverty from which many of them come.

"Most of the girls know this guy might kill



them any minute, anytime, anywhere,” says Javier Valdez Cárdenas, a Culiacán-based reporter and author of the 2010 book *Miss Narco*. “But that’s the only way to mobilise in this society. There’s no employment here. That’s the only option they see.”

It’s impossible to say how cognizant pageant contestants are of narco’s covetous eyes when they sign up. While *Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa* can be a legitimate career step, it’s also a guaranteed way to draw attention — wanted or not — from the cartel’s most powerful operatives.

The pageant’s reputation as an avenue for drug lords to discover new women isn’t a secret, says Valdez Cárdenas. And when it comes to the money and power they hope will serve as bait, “nothing can compete against narcotraffickers”, he says. “There’s no religion, no political body, no government that can compete — they have more money and power than anyone.”

...

Culiacán is Sinaloa’s capital and largest city. Much of the rest of the state is rural, most inhabitants are farmers who produce tomatoes, wheat and sugarcane, among other things. The fertile soil is what has made the cartel’s marijuana- and opium-growing operations so successful.

It sees fewer tourists than other Sinaloan cities, including the beachside destination of Mazatlán. A known hub of cartel activity, Culiacán has been painted by international newspapers as the type

of place where foreigners may be shot or kidnapped as soon as they step off a plane. In reality, parts of the city look more like a quaint European village, a colourful medley of one-story buildings, street murals and outdoor cafés,

Miguel Ángel Vega — who also works as a reporter for *Rudoce*, a Culiacán weekly paper — made contact this week with a representative who assured him we would be granted access to Tuesday’s event.

In Mexico, pageants factor far more prominently in the public consciousness than they do in the US. Titleholders become national celebrities, little girls look up to them, wanting to do what they do.

And part of what they do, it seems, is getting mixed up with drug lords. One of the first known 20th century weddings of a narcotrafficker and a Mexican beauty queen was between the nephew of Chicago mob boss Sam Giancana and Miss Sinaloa 1958 Kenya Kemmerman Bastidas. The following decade, Ana Victoria Santanarés — Miss Sinaloa 1967 — wed Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, a reputed founder of Mexico’s Guadalajara cartel.

The tradition was updated in 2007 when El Chapo himself descended on the small town of Canelas, Durango in a legendary display of courtship. According to news reports, Guzmán Loera arrived by plane during a local celebration, flanked by hundreds of armed men, to woo 17-year-old Miss Coffee and Guava contestant Emma Coronel Aispuro. The two were soon married, and Coronel Aispuro bore Guzmán Loera two daughters. She was by his side when he was arrested in a Mazatlán condo in 2014.

Coronel Aispuro has remained untouched, but the same can’t be said for other women associated with the cartel. In 2008, El Chapo’s mistress Zulema Hernández was killed, some suspect by members of rival cartel Los Zetas. Her body, with

for producing some of the country’s most beautiful women. To narco, these women are prizes.

Manuel (not his real name) is a mid-level trafficker who claims to work for the cartel. At a ranch in Pericos, a town 50 kilometres north of Culiacán, Manuel — who has a wife and two girlfriends — explains the connection between cartel members and beauty queens. “Women and power, they are the same”, he says. “If you have power, you can have women. It’s a luxury. Women love power. That’s why we have so many women — because we can afford them.”

...

Nelly Peña, 23, steps out of her boyfriend’s beat-up white sedan into the blazing Culiacán sun. She’s wearing John Lennon sunglasses, high-waisted jeans and a white crop top. Her thick curly hair is piled on top of her head. She seems a bit short for a beauty queen, but her looks allowed her to work as a model when she was younger. She says her agency encouraged her to raise her profile by competing in pageants.

Resting against the car and occasionally repudiating her Labrador, Simba, that’s running free in the streets — “*¡Simba, fuera! ¡Rápido!*” — Peña explains she took up her agents’ suggestion as a way to advance her career.

“I want to be a TV host, and I want to be good”, she says. “But my dream is to become an actress. That’s what really triggers me.”

In that sense, many women audition for *Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa* for the same reasons they might vie for the title of, say, Miss America or America’s Next Top Model. They want to be actresses or models, TV hosts or spokespeople. The pageant can serve as a launching pad.

But Peña was immediately instructed in the not-so-secret underpinnings of the beauty world. “*Culiacán es muy pequeña*”, she says. Culiacán is very small. “The narcotraffickers know the heads of modelling agencies, so they know who is competing.”

According to Peña, those agency heads will sometimes set up a date between a narcotrafficker and a woman at the narco’s request.

“They say, ‘There is this person who wants to meet you. He can support you in many ways. He can open doors for you’”, says Peña. Sometimes they’re more blunt: “*¿Quieres más dinero?*” she says. Do you want to make more money?

The women are indirectly encouraged to be nice to the men, to flirt, and soon may find themselves on the receiving end of expensive gifts — cars, phones, trips around the world.

“*Que sí*” — if you say yes to them — “you

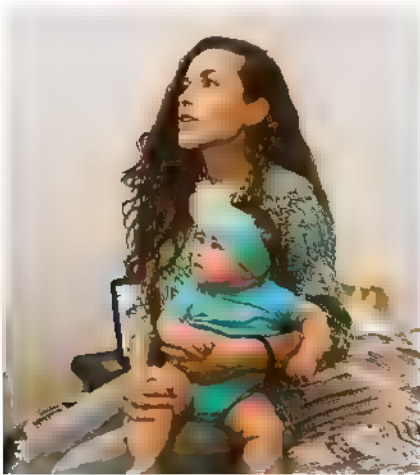
SINALOA HAS A REPUTATION FOR PRODUCING SOME OF THE COUNTRY’S MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN. TO NARCOS, THESE WOMEN ARE PRIZES.

with sidewalk stands selling *horchata* and other *aguas frescas*. A local museum exhibits works of Sinaloa’s most influential artists.

When I arrive the week before the casting, the temperature in Culiacán is approaching 40 degrees. The air is tawny brown, and refracted light bounces off the asphalt. I’m here, admittedly, without much of a plan, my months-long attempts to reach pageant organisers have gone exactly nowhere. But there is some promise. My fixer,

the letter Z reportedly carved into it, was left in a car trunk. In 2012, beauty queen María Susana Flores Gámez was caught in a shootout between Mexican soldiers and high-ranking Sinaloa cartel member Orso Iván Gastélum Cruz, whom she was dating. Gastélum Cruz escaped. Flores Gámez was killed.

The violence hasn’t hampered the relationship between narco and pageant queens, particularly in Sinaloa. The state has a nationwide reputation



1. a Sinaloa street 2 Model and aspiring actress Neily Peña has entered pageants hoping to elevate her career 3 Peña at home in Mexico

have a car outside your house the next day”, says Peña. Seeing the surprise on my face, she says, “If you’re impressed, imagine how they feel when they have nothing and all of a sudden they have a car”

With their activities largely unchecked by cops — many of whom are threatened or paid off — narcos are often free to do whatever they want, to whomever they want. When it comes to courting the state’s *bellezas*, their pick-up techniques have all the subtlety of clubbing a woman over the head and dragging her back to a cave. “When a narco sees a girl he likes, he sends a worker to follow her”, says Josue (not his real name), who once ran cash for the cartel. The worker gets the woman’s address, then the narco starts sending presents.

Manuel confirms this. “If they’re hot, I will select them”, he says. “You ask for their phone number, and you send them gifts — expensive ones, like diamond rings or gold necklaces. Then you just take them to bed.”

“I told you”, he adds, “women love power. And they know who holds the power”

...

“We’re in El Chapo’s territory now”, Ángel Vega says on the Friday morning before the casting. We’re driving south toward Televisoras

Grupo Pacífico’s Mazatlán office. We haven’t heard back from pageant reps after leaving several messages, and Arce Camarena, our primary contact, has been slippery. After promising us VIP access to the casting earlier in the week, he has since avoided our calls. Ángel Vega suggests we make the more than two-hour trip to drop in and say hi.

Outside the borders of Culiacán, the landscape becomes immediately and jarringly rural. Unlike the piled-up buildings of the city, homes in the countryside are scattered amid browned fields. The roadside trails off into dirt with almost no separation from the asphalt.

Thirty minutes into our drive, I explain my original plan for reporting this story: to fly in and out of Culiacán without the cartel knowing I was here. Ángel Vega — who has been reporting on the Sinaloa cartel for almost a decade — turns to me from the driver’s seat.

“Without the cartel knowing?” he says, then throws his head back and laughs. “They already know you’re here.”

The cartel has fly lists, he explains. Upon recognising the name of an American journalist, operatives would have looked into me, possibly even found out what story I was trying to do, then

decided whether I would have access or not.

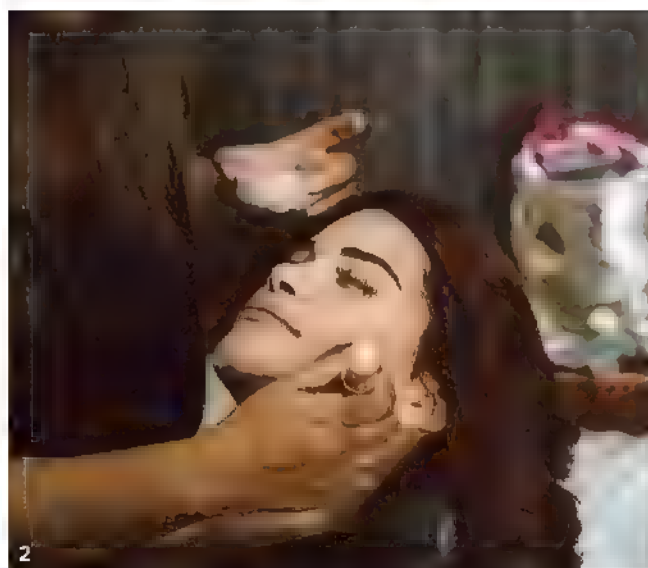
“If they didn’t want you to tell this story, no one would talk to you”, he says. “You would get no interviews. You pose no danger to them, so you’re okay.”

This is a blow to my ego — as a journalist, my job is to pose a danger to certain people. But it also makes me realise how much I’ve bought into the myth of the cartel as an underground operation and of myself as a sort of secret infiltrator.

Valdez Cárdenas explains later that, to Sinaloans, such an assumption is almost laughable. “You have to understand”, he says, “narcotrafficking is a way of life in this society. Every single road connects to the narco world. That’s our reality.”

...

When we finally arrive in Mazatlán, Ángel Vega finagles our way into the station by saying we have a meeting with Arce Camarena. We’re shown through a series of corridors, then deposited on a couch outside a production office. Minutes later, a young dude dressed in what is apparently the international uniform for TV bros — distressed jeans, a hoodie over a T-shirt, Warby Parker-like glasses — comes out. He speaks to Ángel Vega for a minute in Spanish, then Ángel



1 Pérez López having make-up applied at Conchita Torres's beauty salon. 2. An award at a custom gown studio in Culiacán.

Vega translates. Arce Camarena isn't here, he says. He's out in the field. But he's so sorry he missed us, and we're all set with VIP press access to next week's casting. We are both sceptical.

...

In the Las Quintas area of Culiacán, Conchita Torres's eponymous beauty salon is on the second floor of a white and beige stucco building. One of the most renowned hair and make-up stylists in the city, Torres says she has been working with Televisora Grupo Pacífico for nine years.

With indolent brown eyes and a shy smile she can't help flashing every time something amuses her, which is often, Torres talks about the contestants as gently as if they were her own children. It's now Monday night, and her job at tomorrow's casting is to tweak whatever looks the women show up with, making them both pageant- and camera-ready. "I tell them, 'This is too much' or 'This is not enough'", she says. "So let's just balance what you did."

Their hair will be styled in soft waves. Their skin should be even — "not very dark on the arms and light on the shoulders, or vice versa", says Torres — and their make-up will be natural (Natural for pageants and television is, of course, a bit different from natural for every day).

As it happens, when we arrive, Torres is also being visited by Alejandra Rubi Pérez López, 2015's Miss Teenager Mexico and Miss Teenager Earth. Quietly thumbing through magazines in a salon chair, Pérez López is so pretty it's hard not

to stare. She's tall and slim with delicate features, and her thick, espresso brown hair pours perfectly over her shoulders. As of today, Pérez López says, she's been competing in pageants for two years. She started as a way to help her family, but she has determined that the experience also helps her professional polish; she wants to work in marketing one day.

"You see a lot of people from different places, and you learn a lot about different countries", she says, never dropping her Vaseline smile. "It's great for my career."

Pérez López doesn't have a boyfriend — she says her manager has advised her to stay single until she's 25. "I have to devote my focus to my career", she says. "I'm only 18."

But should she catch the eye of the wrong man — even if she turns him down — she may find someone coming after her.

Raquel Vega works at a different beauty salon, one that's popular with narco women. For narcos' mistresses, she says, the biggest risk isn't the narco himself — it's his wife.

"The wives send hitmen to kill the girlfriends", she says. "The wife is the worst enemy they have."

Her clients often spend entire days at the salon — "manicures, pedicures, hair extensions, facial treatments", Vega says — which can cost up to \$600. Many go further, getting breast and butt implants until they begin to look like caricatures. "They don't care about being educated, funny, smart — it's only how they look on the outside",

she says.

But accepting money from a drug lord comes at a price, and Manuel isn't shy about the fact that he expects sex on demand. "F*ck yes", he says. "That's why you pay for their shit. I can go to any of my mistresses, and they better put out."

In fact, he takes it one step further. "I own them", he says. "If you have a pet, whose is that pet? It's yours! Your brother, your cousin, your neighbour — they're not paying for your women, you are. So you own them."

Still, the allure of narco-traffickers is well understood. A young woman I'll call Guadalupe (she won't tell me her real name) says she competed in Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa several years ago. She works as a model now, but some of her friends wound up with narcos. She doesn't begrudge them their choices.

"If, in their hearts, they believe their decisions are the best, I wish them well", she says.

It's too soon to say whether Pérez López will be able to fend off suitors. In the meantime, she focuses on her pageant talent. Learning forward in the salon chair, she pulls out her phone to show us a sample. It's a traditional Sinaloan deer dance, in which Pérez López plays the part of the deer.

"Supposedly you are being hunted. You are hiding from the hunter because you know he is after you, so you are trying to hide away every time", she says. "You are prey."

...

At 8:30 the next morning, the hallway at



Televisora Grupo Pacífico's Culiacán soundstage is full of women. They are otherworldly, tight dresses hugging their curves, their hair magnificently cresting down their backs

We quickly find Arce Camarena, or rather he finds us. It's then, as we're about to clinch the story we're actually here to report, that we find out what has been going on all these months.

First Arce Camarena apologises — he can't let us in. The network told him we're with PLAYBOY, and they don't want to be associated with the magazine. Then, as we press him, he says he can't let us in because we lied about not contacting the network. (No such he was told.)

Finally, five minutes before the cameras flick on, Arce Camarena begins a rapid-fire conversation with Ángel Vega in Spanish. I don't catch all of it, but I do make out "*narcotráfico*" The real reason they don't want us here, it turns out, is because they believe we have nefarious intentions when it comes to the angle of the story.

It's a point I can't argue with. Journalists come to Sinaloa from all over the world to taste the danger associated with the cartel. Many have more straightforward assignments than I do: they want to go to opium fields or interview hit men. But we're all after the same thing: exposing cartel culture.

Which is why I do not give full disclosure, I do not tell the truth when Arce Camarena finishes his conversation with Ángel Vega and approaches me.

"What is your angle?" he asks.

"I want to write about how different beauty pageants are in Mexico than they are in the US."

"What is your angle?" he repeats.

"Well, I also want to talk about how Sinaloa has the most beautiful girls in the country."

He sighs. "*Amiga*", he says. "I know you are going to do whatever you're going to do with your notes and interviews. But I just ask that you not take a negative angle."

I am embarrassed, I am humbled, and I briefly debate calling the story off. After all, I believe Nelly, and I believe Alejandra, and I believe Guadalupe when they say they entered pageants to advance their careers. What woman can be faulted for using a God-given advantage to secure her future? If that advantage happens to be beauty, so be it. Why should I tarnish the image of an organisation that offers them that opportunity?

Arce Camarena decides to let us stay, but we have to wait outside. He then disappears behind the two doors separating us from the soundstage.

It's now one minute to showtime. I stand in the hallway with Ángel Vega and our photographer, all of us unsure if we should leave. Right then, a blonde woman dressed like a CEO pushes open the doors and heads inside. Ángel Vega, looking straight ahead, says, "You might make it in."

I have seconds to make the call. I jump up and follow her into the room.

...

Arce Camarena is pacing in front of the bleachers, yelling commands to a crew of at least a dozen. The 16 contestants are now onstage, so brightly lit that their primary-color dresses make them look like a box of beautiful crayons: bright yellow, deep blue, siren red.

Perla Beltrán Acosta, Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa 2008, who now serves as the pageant's co-ordinator, is demonstrating the proper way to walk. She glides across the stage, turns down the runway, stops at the microphone, turns again and glides back. The women laugh at how easy she makes it look. When she steps away for an on-camera interview, the competitors are briefly released to change clothes before filming officially begins. They scatter to find their parents and friends. One yells up to the bleachers: "*¡Mama!*" Her mother tosses down a multi-coloured bikini top. "*¡Y los otros!*" Down come the matching bottoms.

Suddenly I feel two large hands on my

see you recording, I'm kicking you out."

Ten minutes later, the contestants reappear wearing only bathing suits and high heels. The cameras roll, and the contest begins.

...

In online photos, the women in Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa's annual line-up look like lean, classy Kardashians, all cartoon curves, implausibly big eyes and hair that seems like it should smell perpetually of strawberries. In person, they're even more unreal. Gathering at the stage's edge in groups of three, they step up one by one, cross to the middle, bear left down the runway and approach the microphone to answer questions from the four judges.

The first contestant seems nervous but not inexperienced. At the end of the runway, she places her hand expertly on her hip. The questions take about three minutes, and she is then escorted into a room behind the bleachers.

The second has a bit more spunk. She stops to pose at the microphone, shaking her extravagant hair out behind her.

Contestant number three speaks in a mature, soothing alto. Placing her fingertips delicately on the microphone, she addresses the judges: "*Buenos días*", she says. Why do you think you should be Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa? "*Por mi carisma.*"

The women continue their parade for more than an hour. Each presents a slight variation on the aesthetic theme. One has a waist so small her hands touch when she places them on her hips.

"NARCOTRAFFICKING IS A WAY OF LIFE IN THIS SOCIETY. EVERY SINGLE ROAD CONNECTS TO THE NARCO WORLD. THAT'S OUR REALITY."

shoulders. Arce Camarena, somehow, has materialised behind me. "*Amiga*", he says again, "you know you're not supposed to be in here."

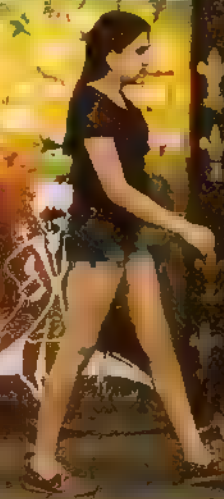
I fumble through a shoddy explanation. I thought only my *photographer* couldn't come in. Couldn't I just stand back here and watch? I don't even have my notebook with me, see? He looks at me as if he pities my dilemma and my general state of existence.

"Fine", he says, turning to walk away. "But if I

Another looks so young and wobbly her presence here is almost uncomfortable. One of the last to take the stage is jaw-dropping. Wearing a purple keyhole bikini top and matching bottom, she is all soft skin and taut muscle. A male judge on the panel unabashedly asks her to turn and walk toward the back of the stage — twice.

"Why do you want to be Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa?" he asks her.

"*Porque soy hermosa.*" Because I'm beautiful.





It's 11:41AM when the last contestant takes her turn. The finale is bumpy; she makes it about halfway down the runway before the worst befalls her — she trips, landing on her knees with a thud. A gasp rises from the crowd. The woman in front of me covers her mouth with both hands. But our hero recovers; she stands back up, takes a deep breath, gestures dramatically to the floor, suggesting to the room that she fell because of a wet spot, and returns to the back of the stage, allowing a frantic stagehand to furiously mop the area in question. She then starts her walk over again, steps up to the microphone and giggles. All is forgotten.

With the contest complete, the elimination will take place on the spot. We are barred explicitly from this portion of the event, so we wait in the hallway as the contestants learn their fates. When they emerge, most breeze right past us. Their faces reveal nothing, in true beauty queen form.

...

Ángel Vega and I are driving aimlessly around the city. It's the day after the casting, and no one will speak to me. Calls to Arce Camarena go straight to voice mail. Ross Beltrán, a pageant trainer, offered yesterday to introduce us to the current Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa. Now he won't answer his phone. Even the contestants, the women whose stones I'm looking for, won't take my calls or reply to texts. (Arce Camarena, when asked later, will deny having anything to do with this.)

The previous day's finalists spend the coming weeks training in public speaking, runway walking and talent, and on July 2, Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa 2016 is crowned: Denisse Iridiane Franco Peña, the same contestant who called out to her mother to toss down her bikini. She is notably exquisite, even, I dare say, more so than her competitors.

Nothing indicates that this pageant was fixed, though most *culichis* say it's common knowledge that narcotraffickers buy victories for their favourite women. Then again, it's hard to know what's real in Sinaloa's pageant world. When María Susana Flores Gámez was killed in 2012, the story was reported around the world: "A 20-year-old state beauty queen died in a gun battle between soldiers and what appeared to be a gang of drug traffickers", wrote the Associated Press. "A Mexican beauty queen was killed during a

weekend shootout in Sinaloa", said CNN.

The story told by most *culichis*, though, is quite different.

The man with Flores Gámez on the night she died, Orso Iván Gastélum Cruz, is known colloquially as El Cholo Iván. He's a mean-looking motherfucker; US authorities have called him one of the most violent men in the Sinaloa cartel. While accounts of their courtship vary, according to multiple sources, El Cholo started to pursue Flores Gámez when she was just 15 or 16 years old and he was about 25. When she supposedly turned him down, he decided to force the issue.

"He kidnapped her family", says one source. "*Su madre y su hermano.*" Her mother and her

THE WOMEN LOOK LIKE LEAN, CLASSY KARDASHIANS, ALL CARTOON CURVES, BIG EYES AND HAIR THAT SHOULD SMELL OF STRAWBERRIES.

brother.

Maybe Flores Gámez grew to love the man some say pushed himself into her life. Or maybe she was so terrified she didn't dare leave. But what's clear is this: On the day of her death, she was with El Cholo. When their entourage was overtaken by the Mexican army in a small Sinaloa village, El Cholo reportedly told Flores Gámez to stay in the truck, saying she wouldn't be shot because she was a woman. He and some of his entourage then escaped.

Newspapers would report that Flores Gámez was holding a gun when she stepped from the truck. Officials did not confirm whether she fired. Either way, when she emerged, María Susana Flores Gámez was shot dead.

...

Not all women who date narcotraffickers have their lives end in tragedy. Nor do all men who work for the cartel. After running cash for

the cartel for just one year, Josue was captured by a rival cartel in Tijuana. He was held for 72 hours and tortured — his hand still bears the scars. But he feels lucky to have escaped with his life.

"After I got caught and tortured", he says, "I thought, I don't want to die."

Still, narcos are seemingly in the mindset of violence more often than not. Manuel claims he has never hit a woman, but he has come close. "Once I was drunk, and I crashed one of their doors", he says. "I didn't hit her, but I destroyed her f*cking room. Then I had to pay for repairs. It is a damn circle: fight, reconciliation, make up. It is like a f*cking war."

But is it really so different, powerful men hunting beautiful women, from what happens anywhere else in the world? From Los Angeles to New York, underage girls are routinely seduced by middle-aged executives. The violence is certainly less flagrant, but accusations of statutory rape make headlines — and the alleged perpetrators rarely face consequences.

Beautiful women have one thing powerful men can't get via their usual means, whatever those means may be. The acquisition of that beauty by force, then, seems to be met with a blind eye — no matter what country you call home.

...

The night before I leave Culiacán, I visit Peña again to say goodbye. She lives in a one-bedroom house with her mother, her boyfriend, her four-month-old daughter and Simba. Their toilet is broken, and discarded objects are pushed into corners throughout the house.

Peña is about to start a job at a television station that she hopes will support her family. She still dreams of acting — she loves Tarantino movies, including *The Hateful Eight*. Angelina Jolie and Dakota Fanning are her favourite actresses.

Before I leave, Peña's mother acknowledges that the family doesn't have much. "But", she says, "we are happy."

When it comes to her own daughter, Peña hopes to raise her the same way she was raised, self-sufficient, confident and with bulletproof values.

"I want to raise her to be the best she can possibly be and support her in anything she wants to do", she says. "Whatever she decides." ■



10 MINUTES WITH :

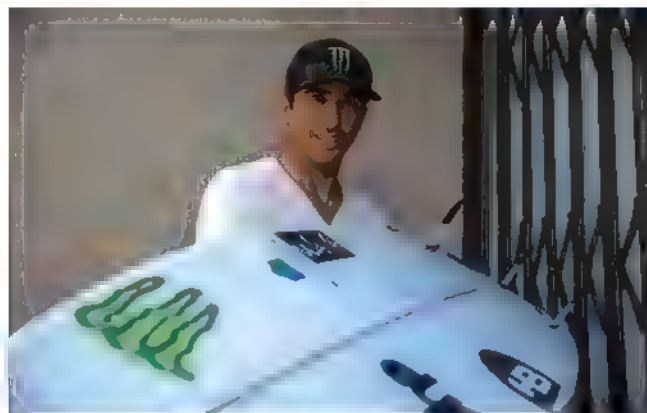
MIGUEL PUPO, BEYRICK DE VRIES AND YAGO DORA - POST BALLITO PRO CATCHUP.

Photography by ALAN VAN GYSEN



MIGUEL PUPO - 25 years old
Maresias Sao Paulo, Brazil
Born 19 November 1991

This is my fourth time to Ballito. My first with my brother (Samuel Pupo) and my dad. It's amazing traveling with my brother on tour (WSL - World Surf League QS - qualifying series) as it reminds me how young I was when I started competing, and how old I am now in comparison to my younger self and my brother, haha. I mean I have a wife and child now! I've learnt so much since I started competing, and I see how much he (Samuel) has to learn. When you're young you make so many mistakes. You're so hungry and you just want it so bad. It's even more amazing having my dad here as he too competed for many many years. All three of us have such good talks about competing, life and surfboards, especially as my dad is a surfboard shaper.



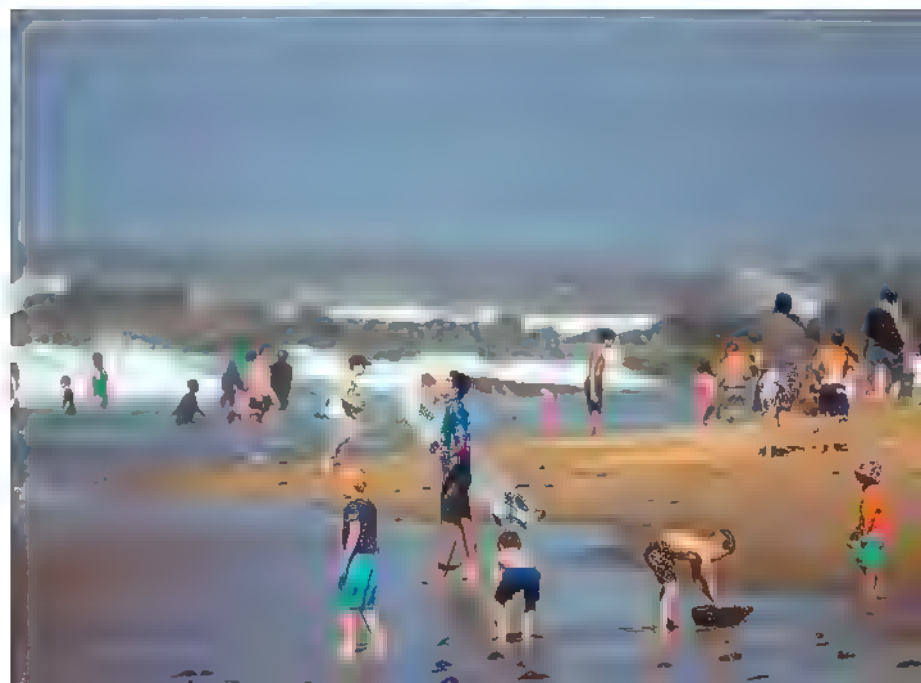
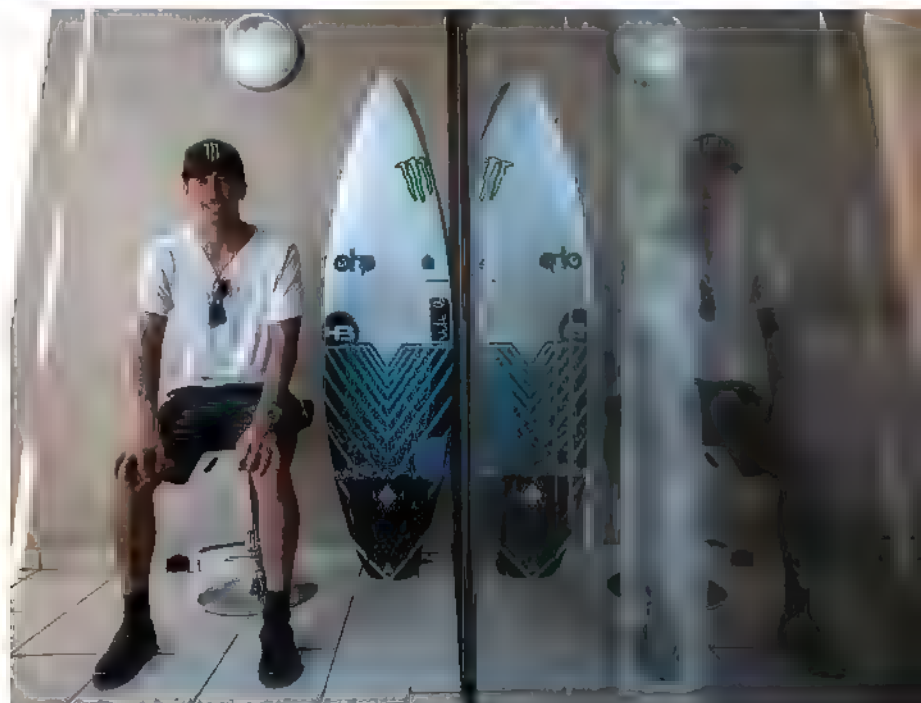


now. He learnt so much as a professional surfer, I've learnt so much as a professional, and now we get to share two different careers with Samuel, it's very special. I believe he has a better chance of making the tour (WSL CT - championship tour) and having a better career with two close people who went through two different eras of professional surfing.

When you start any competitive year, the goal is always to re-qualify and to stay on tour, to get results straight away. If you don't get results in the first half of the year - which unfortunately happened to me, you have to make the big switch to surf the QS tour as well as the CT - both tours. It takes a lot of energy, and means traveling all the time which is all the more difficult now that I have a small family. You miss home a lot, and it hurts really bad, but you got to do what you got to do. Surfing is great though, as it's always a learning curve. Every single heat is new and different. There is no rule book and you have to be open and prepared to figure things out in the moment within that 30-minute heat to be your best and get through. This is what I love about competing.

This was my first QS event this year, so getting an equal 5th is really great, especially since I'm currently ranked #30 on the CT and in danger of not re-qualifying for 2018. But it's ok, it just means I have to give every heat 110% and surf the best I've ever surfed. It pushes you which is good. It's also good surfing the QS for me this year because I get to do it with my brother and be there for him all year. When you're young like he is, you win a lot of heats and events just from pure talent, but my dad and I are encouraging him to develop the other very important aspects of what makes a professional surfer, especially when he goes fully on tour and you have 100 of the world's best surfers with the same talent as you do. It's gnarly. For me, at the beginning of my professional career, I lost a lot of heats, and it's easy to get despondent and beat down. You start doubting yourself, asking "can I really do this? Am I good enough?" So you have to really work on the little things, as every little thing makes a difference out there. Take that heat today that I surfed against Jordy (The Ballito Pro quarter final), the level of the surfing was the same in my opinion, but it was those little things that ultimately make the difference. For me I think it was that one turn that could have been bigger, and maybe a priority mistake. You have to have your mind set and clear so you can think out there and be your best.

The board I surfed at this event is quite different from the boards I usually surf. I mean on the CT you're surfing perfect, mostly bigger, quality waves, but out here in Ballito - and at most of the events on the QS, you're surfing short, imperfect waves - mostly at beach breaks. The boards I brought here from Brazil were actually made for Jeffrey's Bay, so they





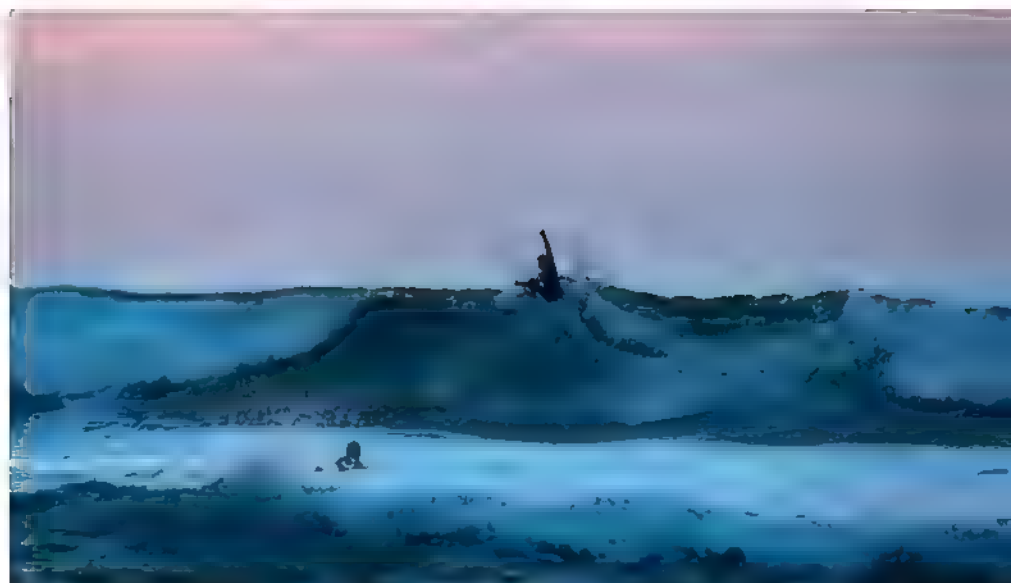
weren't going well. My dad actually shaped me a brand new board here in South Africa just for Ballito, which was amazing! It's dimensions are: 5'10" x 18 1/4" x 2 1/4" with a little squash tail. I have small feet, so I have trouble riding anything with a big or wide tail. The wave here is very quick, so you have to bottom turn really quick and hit it really fast. The tail makes a big difference. I'm so stoked my dad was here to see the conditions and shape me this magic board.

Surfing against Jordy (Smith) in front of his home crowd was obviously difficult. I also had a very tough heat against Ramzi (Boukhiam) before that quarter final heat against Jordy. For me Ramzi and Mikey Wright were the standouts of the competition. Unfortunately it's not often that the standouts of any event go on to win, surfing is strange like that. I had a funny feeling that whoever was going to win that quarter final heat was going to win the event. I can't explain it, I just woke up the morning of the finals and knew it. Obviously I was hoping it would be me, but when I lost to Jordy I knew he would win the event, haha! I was really focused at this event, and when you're that focused you can feel and sense things like this. I gave my heart to that quarter final and did my best so I'm happy with the result.

I see surfing and my own competitive career very different now compared to when I was young and just starting out. If I could go back I would probably travel more to be at events earlier and surf those specific waves more to gain the experience you need and prepare more. When I qualified at age 18 for the tour I felt a lot of pressure surfing new places, places like Teahupo'o and Fiji. I feel like I surfed these places well because I have the talent, but you don't feel comfortable when you're surfing against very experienced surfers like Kelly Slater etc. This is what I'm trying to tell my brother - and my dad for my brother. Just give the tour a little more time, travel to the world tour waves and get the experience you need before you qualify for the CT (championship tour). You have time. You don't want to qualify at age 18 or 19 and fall off the CT because of inexperience. I think if you qualify at age 23 with more maturity it's better.

BEYRICK DE VRIES - 24 years old
Umhlanga, Durban, South Africa
Born 14 December 1992

Ballito is just like my home break down the coast at Umhlanga with the angle of the beaches facing in the exactly the same direction. The





makeup too, with deep and shallow parts making the waves break the same. I've been surfing this event for six years now with my best result being the quarter finals last year after I beat Jordy (Smith).

Before I learnt how to win I learnt how to lose. The only thing that makes sense to me in competition surfing is to focus on the 30-minute time-slots you're given. Check the waves an hour before and surfing your own heat to the best of your ability with the waves you're offered. Although I was knocked out of this event early, I felt like I surfed a good heat. The unfortunate fact is that I was out of rhythm with the ocean. You can never fight being out of rhythm with the ocean. Without a canvas you can't draw any lines and produce the art you need. I try not let the emotional stuff like last years good result, the crowd, the pressure, the rhythm etc get to me.

My number one rule I instituted last year was to never back down and give every heat I surf everything I have. Surfing safe and for the judges isn't fun and it's not going to win you heats. And it doesn't inspire you to surf more. You get stagnant surfing safe. So I gave it everything I had and it just didn't work out this year. That's surfing unfortunately.

The board I rode in The Ballito Pro was especially ordered for this wave. It has a bit more rocker up front in the nose. It's a 5'11" x 19" x 2.1/4" with a squash tail. The rails are quite sharp which is less forgiving, but it helps draw great lines and gives me good drive out of the board.

I'm stoked I won the Monster Expression session for the second year running. My strike-rate and success at landing airs is quite high, so it's a no-brainer that I surf these expression sessions,

and I love surfing for the crowd. Bowing out of the main event was actually a blessing - if you look at the silver lining, I've always seen The Ballito Pro from within as a competitor wearing a competitive jersey, but this year looking at it from the outside almost from the crowds perspective was fantastic. There is so much happening at The Ballito Pro from the surfing to the day activities, the night time functions and parties. Seeing all the faces on the dance floor last night and hanging out with everyone during the day with the fantastic atmosphere during the day it just makes you excited to go big in those Expression sessions for the crowd and your friends. When you land a big air it's so close to the beach that you can clearly hear the spectators go wild and cheer. It's like an amphitheatre. It's epic. Surfing is how I express myself, and those expression sessions are perfect for that. The best thing about The Ballito Pro is that it caters for anyone from two years old to eighty years old. There is something down here for everyone. It's just a great festival for everyone.

Looking at the year ahead I want to continue approaching it as I did after my year off last year. I don't want to be overly serious, and I want to enjoy my surfing while having fun. My results come when I'm having fun and enjoying myself. I love socialising and the different characters and cultures this qualifying tour brings together around the world. I don't think many people fully appreciate and get to know all the different characters and personalities on tour. Together with Monster I'm stoked to be able to enjoy the other aspects of being a professional surfer, so that when I'm not competing I'm still doing other things. You can't take surfing too seriously in my opinion. Have to play the game and enjoying everything it has to offer. The film project I'm currently working on - 'Higher Light' is focused on all of this. The simple enjoyment and love of surfing, both as a professional and as a non-professional. The other day someone came up to me and asked me why we as surfers always run down to the waters edge. It's because surfing is a nature high and it only ever gives, never taking away. It fuels happiness and stoke and we're all the better for it. For me it's not about being the best, it's about loving life and why we get up in the morning to surf. It's about all the little things in the life as a surfer. Traveling, hanging with friends, enjoying a beer at sunset, getting barrelled, catching a fish etc. It's everything. It's life. And I'm loving it. There is too much goodness in here not to be happy and loving life.



YAGO DORA - 21 years old
Florianópolis, Brazil
Born 18 May 1996

This was my first time to Ballito. I love it! I like the place and the waves are fun. I've been watching this comp for a few years now and I've been dreaming of coming here and being in contention for a title win. This wave is fun for me. This definitely wasn't my best surfing in an event, but I got through a few good heats and I got a relatively good result. My main goal this year is to finish top 10 on the QS and qualify for the world championship tour. So I'm really focused on every single event I do, and I'm happy to be sitting in third on the QS rankings.

The board I surfed at The Ballito Pro is a Mayhem 'Pocket-Rocket'. It's a 6.0 rounded-squash with 27 litres of volume. It's actually a copy of the board I won the Newcastle QS6000 on. This one is a really magic board, and it's really special. I got a third on this board in Rio and a number of other good results. I usually only ride it in heats now and I try to keep it safe and in top shape. I use different surfboards for free-surf session now, haha! Interesting it wasn't made for any specific wave, it's just an all-round great board for all conditions under six-feet.

Since I started surfing my dad has been traveling with me a lot. He likes to film a lot too which is really great, and very important for

me to improve my surfing. These days it's more strategic analysis of my heats than actual surfing technique. Which boards to choose, where to sit during the heat etc.

Being a Brazilian on tour these days is fantastic. I mean the top three guys on the QS rankings are all Brazilian which is amazing to see. It's pretty cool because we have a team vibe at every contest. When we surf against each other in a heats it's war obviously, but if a Brazilian is doing well in a heat against someone else we all support him 100% and cheer them on. It's like a big family. And the support is so great. That is definitely one of my favourite things.

My dream wave on tour would probably be Cloudbreak in Fiji. I didn't do too well there recently, but it's a special wave and I've been putting in more time there so I'm looking forward to being on the tour and being able to surf in that event especially.

Surfing in the Rio CT my goal and dreams definitely became even more clear. I mean up till the end of last year I had been doing a lot of free-surf trips and projects, and surfing some contests, but after Rio something just clicked and I know I want to be on the championship tour and give it my best. I want this! Being on the championship tour really is living the dream. Every one of the events on the CT are like doing a free-surf trip. The waves are just so perfect. ■





VALENTIN

JEAN

THE NEW SEASON'S FLEET



ANDERSON



My hobbies and interests

My hobbies include traveling, going to festivals, Pilates and yoga, being in the water, swimming and catching sun. I also enjoy being outdoors, hiking and camping. Experiencing a new beautiful place is my favourite. I absolutely love to read. I read a lot of books on psychology and philosophy. Picking apart the human mind and continuously learning about mankind is really interesting to me. I've always taken an interest in designing or creating new things such as clothing/bikinis or fun artistic DIY projects.

My goals and ambitions

I have many goals, Playboy having been one of them. I really want to shoot for sports Illustrated and Maxim and branch out to other avenues as well, such as Guess and clothing companies that really empower strong women. I am currently in the process of creating a bikini line which I hope to launch in the summer of 2018. Another goal would be to officially be moved to the city of Los Angeles as of late 2018. I've always loved that city.

Who inspires me

A few of my inspirations are my mother for her strength, Prince, a musical genius, for his erotic sexuality. And those around the world who live their lives freely as themselves and not whom others suppose they should be.

My favourite quote

"The idea that we are so capable of love, but still choose to be toxic."

Turn on

Humour

Turn off

Living with your parents

The perfect date

A bottle of Cabernet on the beach at night

My girl crush

Stephanie Knight

My favourite food

Oh, it's a tie between steak and chicken wings from Hooters. Yummy

My biggest fear

Being stranded in the middle of the ocean with my legs dangling and not a boat in sight

One destination I like to visit

Bahamas, I want to travel there so bad

I'm not embarrassed to say

Anything. I lack a filter and "I'm a total weirdo. Hang out with me and you'll be laughing all day."

Final thought

The greatest thing about life is being able to be yourself, chase your dreams, and experience new exciting places and ways of life. Remember to be brave and silly.

If you want to see more of Kaitlynn you can follow her on Instagram @kaitlynnjanderson or Snapchat @kaitlynn_anderson



Bra 34C

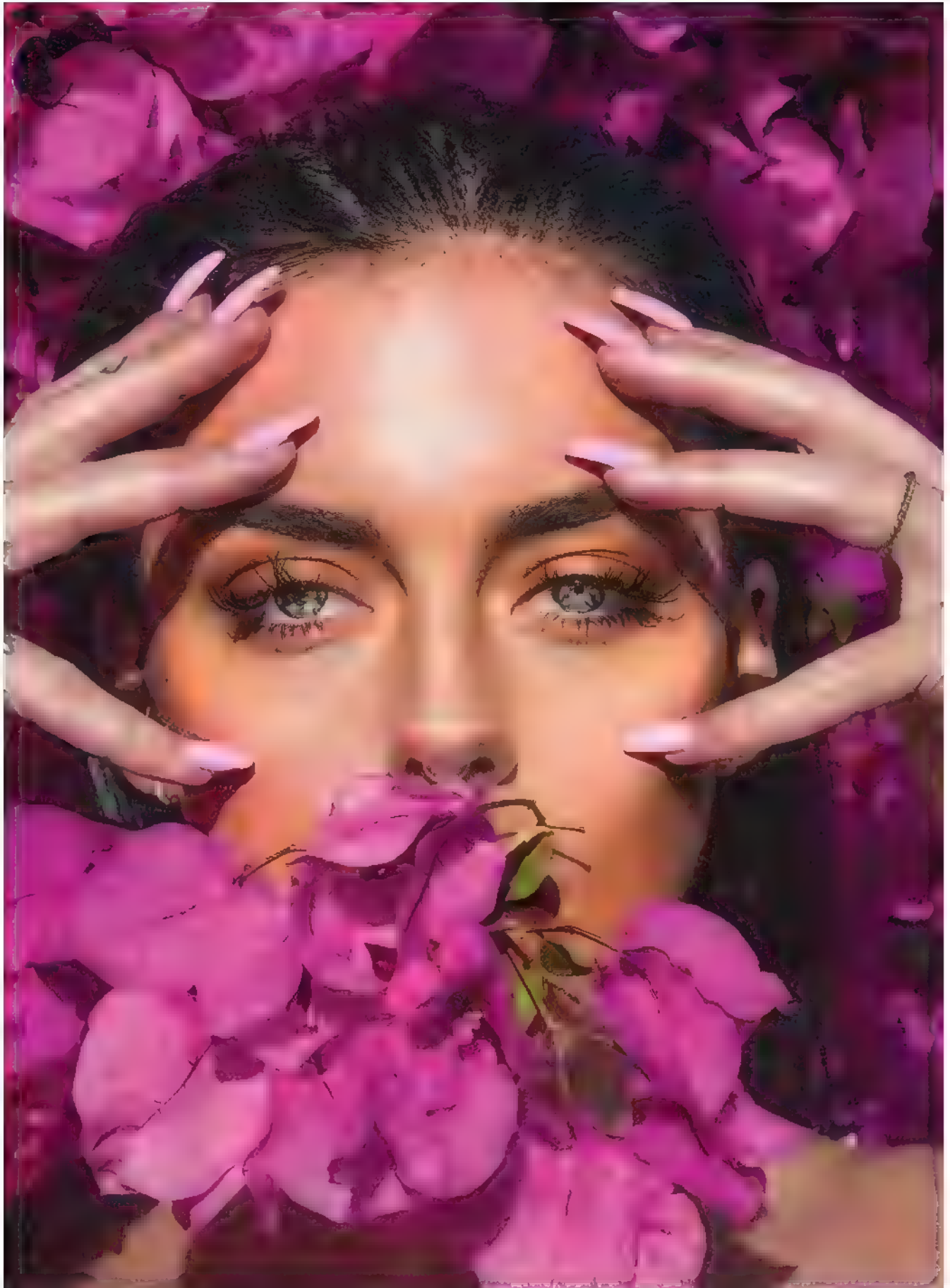
Waist 25

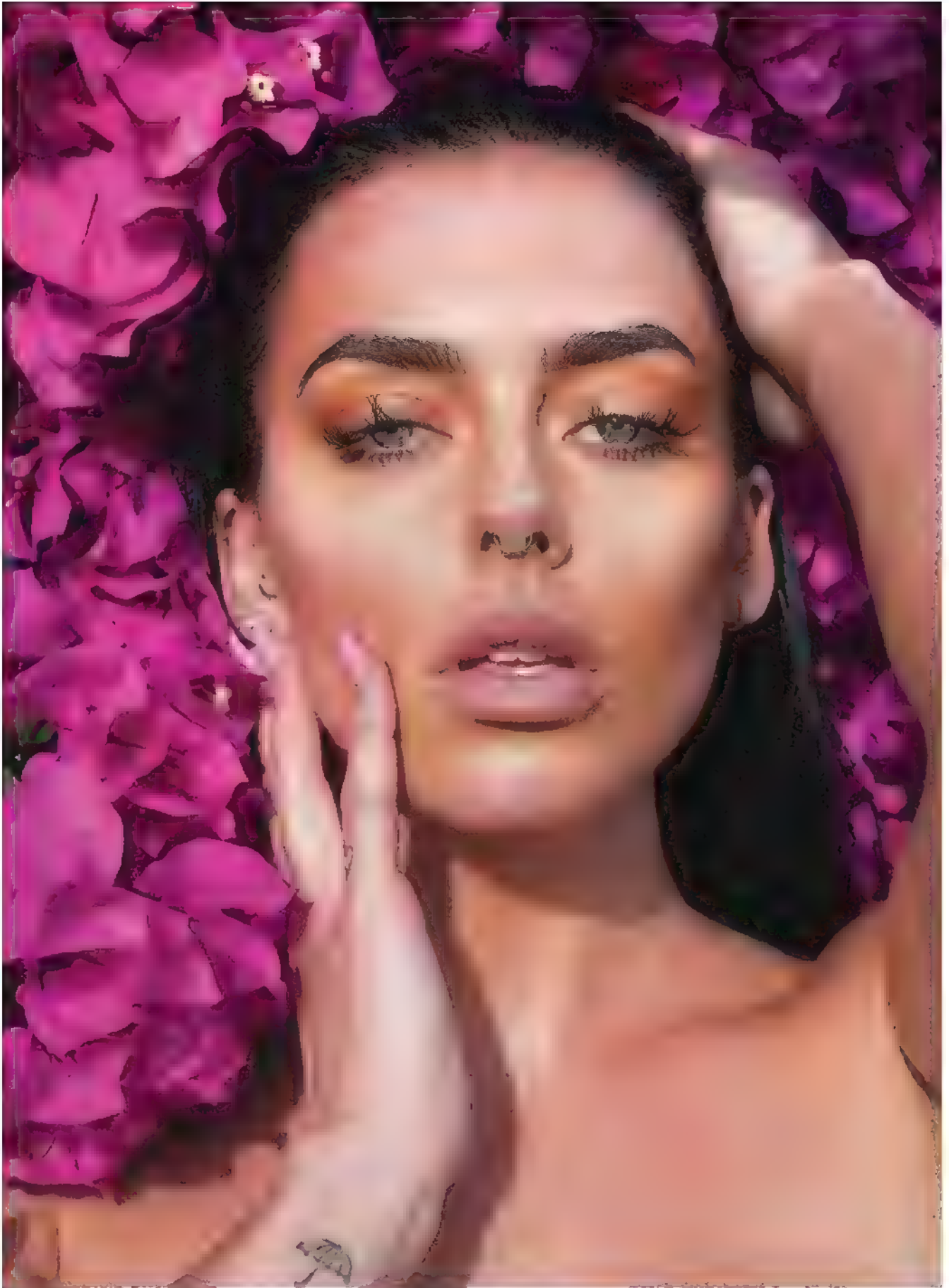
Hips 83cm

Height 5'3"

Weight 117

Eye color Blue











At the corner of Liberty Road and Staples Street, deep in Houston's Fifth Ward, Drake is not in the building but on it. It's an unusually cool late afternoon in spring — the temperature hasn't risen above the low 60s all day — and the artist, dressed in white sweats and a thick white hoodie from his OVO clothing line that's emblazoned with the word OCTOBER, is toting a tall white cup with unknown contents. He has just ascended onto the roof of Mo Mo's Chicken and Waffle, a tan-painted soul-food joint that has a gaudy purple sign out front bearing its name and all the charm of a suburban strip mall.

The Canadian actor, two-time Saturday Night Live host and multiplatinum-selling rapper, whose 2016 album *Views* has been streamed more than 1 billion times on Spotify, Apple Music and other services, is surrounded by an imposingly large crew that includes longtime friend and associate James "Jas" Prince and his father, James Prince.

Fifth Ward native, owner of Mo Mo's and, more significantly, godfather of Southern hip-hop.

Paterfamilias James — known to most by his one-letter nickname, J — and Jas are a foundational family in hip-hop. In the mid-1980s the elder Prince founded the influential Houston record label Rap-A-Lot, through which he released some of the darkest and most uncompromising hip-hop in the music's history, including the Geto Boys' "Mind Playing Tricks on Me", ranked by Rolling Stone as the fifth-greatest hip-hop song of all time. Twenty-plus years later, son

Jas drove the trajectory of Drake's career from aspiring Canadian rapper struggling to be heard on social media to one of the most dominant artists of the streaming era.

"Houston is a very special place", Drake explains over text message. "You can find inspiration in a two or three-day trip there. It became a big part of my life because it was essentially where I got signed. The Prince family are a staple in this city. I witnessed that and immediately wanted to have that same respect in Toronto that J Prince has in his city, making positive changes and giving people music and moments that will last forever."

For a while, Drake and the Prince clan seem content greeting and taking selfies with the approximately 5000 fans who have shut down Liberty Road, amid the incessant shout-outs from the DJ ("Drake is in the building!").

But hours later, just as the sun begins to set, Drake picks up a microphone, strides somewhat penitently toward the edge of the roof and launches into a distinctly Houstonian spin on his

"Hotline Bling" "Ever since you left the Fifth Ward. .", he croons, leaving the line dangling in the air. The revellers roar with delight; he's just replaced a portion of the lyric "Ever since I left the city/You got a reputation for yourself now" with a nod to their neighbourhood. The shoulder-to-shoulder crowd lining Liberty Road chants along to this new, Texas version of the song. Later, the raucous birthday party will be covered by media ranging from the Houston Chronicle to TMZ. (DRAKE SHUTS DOWN HOUSTON STREET, WE GOTTA PARTY.)

Just one day earlier, Drake played a party during the annual film, interactive media and music conference South by Southwest, but it's this Houston show at Mo Mo's that truly thrills. It's so far removed from the machinations of the music industry and so close to the heart of one of the most vital cities in hip-hop and R&B history, the breeding ground for everyone from Beyoncé to the late, iconic street rapper Pimp C, whom Drake samples on *Views*. And it's a moment atop a chicken and waffle shop in a low-income, majority African American neighborhood in the South, with an artist who is not just the biggest star in hip-hop but one of only two men (Michael Jackson being the other) to concurrently hold the Billboard top spot for song and album for seven straight weeks — that demonstrates the extraordinary and enduring power of the Prince family brand.

...

The story of the Prince empire's acquisition of Aubrey "Drake" Graham begins in 2007 in a place as unlikely as Mo Mo's: Myspace. It was on the social media network, on a visually cluttered and sophomoric page [myspace.com/thisisdrake](https://www.myspace.com/thisisdrake) — that the former Degrassi: The Next Generation child star and aspiring Toronto rapper posted several songs, including the light, finger-snap-driven rhythmic hip-hop of "Replacement Girl", along with an extremely clunky bio proclaiming "collective attendance of over 20 000 fans for mall tours".

Fortunately for Drake, more than 1600 kilometres south in Houston, Jas Prince was in a similarly amateurish place. He'd graduated from Houston's private Alexander Smith Academy, where he'd excelled at soccer, track, football and baseball, and had spent his summers working a series of jobs at Rap-A-Lot that included sweeping floors, sorting mail and handing out flyers for the label's street team. But he earned the disapproval of his extremely entrepreneurial father by spending his post-high-school years

merely hanging out — and not forging business deals — with longtime family friends from Cash Money Records, including Lil Wayne. "Don't just be kicking around Wayne and not getting any business done," James scolded Jas back then. "Go to him. Let him know you have \$1 million of your own money to start a label."

The offer of a seven-figure investment was a moment of profound good fortune that typically shines only on children of the one percent like Jas. But he wasn't interested in his father's deal. Instead, he sought to convince Wayne that the pair should manage this artist Jas had heard on Myspace. However, after hearing Drake, the rapper's response was bluntly dismissive: "It sucks," Jas remembers Wayne saying. "Don't ever play this shit for me again." James Prince had a similar reaction. "He played Drake for me", James recalls, "and I was like, 'Jas, you like this?' I wasn't feeling it. But Jas said, 'Dad, this is the new sound. Trust me on this.'" James pressed his son, querying him about the new sound's hometown. "Toronto", Jas replied. James was stunned; it was as if Jas wanted to sign a rapper from another — and very much whiter — planet. "Canada?" James asked sceptically. "But then he said a key word to me", James continues. "'He's buzzing in Canada.' My ears stuck up like a German shepherd's."

Encouraged by his father's interest — however slight — Jas concocted a plan to win Wayne over. "I sent Drake tracks he wasn't supposed to have", he says, "like hot Wayne songs. And I was like, 'Rap over them.'" Drake acquiesced and quickly sent the finished product back to Jas. Armed with a demo that included Drake rhyming over much more potent tracks than his mostly weightless work on Myspace, Jas slid the CD into the car stereo as he and Wayne drove to their favourite jeweller, Exotic Diamonds, on Westheimer Road in the trendy Galleria area. "I'm looking at him and I see him bobbing his head", Jas says. "I'm like, Okay, cool. I turn it up. We're jamming. I play the next song. He turns it down. 'Who is this?' 'That's the megga Drake you told me sucked.' I play the next song, 'Brand New', one that Drake is singing on. And Wayne's like, 'Who's this?'"

"Oh, that's Drake. He sings and he acts."

"Where is Drake?"

"In Toronto."

"Can we get him here?"

"Let me call him."

Jas dialled Drake, who was sitting in a barber's chair in Toronto, unaware that Jas was sitting with one of the greatest rappers in the history of hip-hop. "Let me call you back", Drake



said dismissively "Hold up one second", Jas interrupted, handing the phone to Wayne.

"Wayne got on the phone like, 'What's up?'" Jas recalls "Drake's like, 'Who's this?' 'It's Weezy'." There was stunned silence on the other end of the line as Wayne handed the phone back to Jas. With Lil Wayne finally feeling Drake, Jas urged the artist to take the earliest flight out of Toronto to Houston.

The next day was Wayne and Jas's first face-to-face meeting with Drake. Up until that point he and Jas had been communicating only via technology. "I brought him on the bus to meet Wayne, and it was awkward", Jas says. "Wayne wasn't saying nothing to him." Wayne suggested they all ride in his tour bus from Houston to Atlanta, but even the nearly 1300-kilometre road trip didn't bring Wayne and Drake any closer together. Back then, Wayne kept stacks of clothing in the bunks that were meant for sleeping, forcing all onboard to squeeze uncomfortably into the seats up front. And those seats were populated by emerging artists from Wayne's

Young Money Entertainment — which would later sign and then break Nicki Minaj — who viewed the newbie Drake with deep suspicion.

But then Wayne, Drake and Jas hit the recording studio in Atlanta, and the awkwardness of the bus ride gave way to profound chemistry. There, Wayne and Drake recorded "Stunt Hard" and, most magnificently, "Forever", which in 2008 would be transformed into a stellar posse cut featuring Wayne and hip-hop heavyweights Eminem and Kanye West. "Forever" employs a reliable template: flipping stellar beats made for others into a brand-new context. (The song's beat had been used by Canadian rapper Kardinal Offishall as well as by Drake's camp.) "Three weeks after that, the songs leaked", Jas says. "It was like, 'Who is this kid rapping with Wayne, basically killing it?'"

In the space of months, Drake went from Myspace obscurity to the most buzzed-about rapper in hip-hop, one who could hold his own on a posse track with Kanye and Eminem. That his streak of success continues nearly one decade later — in June, *Views* held the number one spot on the Billboard album chart for five weeks straight, the longest run since Adele's 25 in 2015 — makes his ongun story all the more remarkable.

Drake's post-Atlanta sessions were cemented

by a series of lucrative deals that Jas and the Cash Money crew struck for him. In December 2008, Drake signed an exclusive recording-artist agreement with Aspire Music Group, which was run by Lil Wayne's longtime manager, Cortez Bryant. In June 2009, Aspire entered into a deal to furnish "the exclusive recording services of Drake" to Wayne's Young Money Entertainment/Cash Money Records. The following month, an arrangement was drawn up whereby Jas and a company he'd created just to manage Drake, Young Empire Music Group, would receive 22 percent of Aspire's one-third share of profit advances, net profits and other advances from Drake's Young Money/Cash Money deal. The same month, Drake received a \$2 million advance from Young Money, Cash Money and Aspire.

AFTER HEARING DRAKE, LIL WAYNE SAID, "DON'T EVER PLAY THIS SHIT FOR ME AGAIN."

More than seven years later, however, the fruits of that flurry of deal-making are very much in dispute. Jas claims that Cash Money has not paid out more than \$5 million in Drake profits, a claim Cash Money vigorously denies, according to court documents. After a series of angry exchanges between the Prince and Cash Money camps — including an April 22, 2014 e-mail from James obtained by PLAYBOY that reads, "I was born at night but not last night what's up with the money home" — Jas and Young Empire sued Cash Money in federal court in Florida. Attorneys for Cash Money later filed a motion to dismiss the August 2014 lawsuit; the motion was granted by a federal judge in May 2015. (Jas says he refiled the lawsuit in a different venue, in New York, in late 2015 and that the case is still pending.)

The behind-the-scenes legal wrangling between Jas and Cash Money cannot tarnish Drake's triumph, nor can it break the bonds among Jas, Drake and the city that gave us the Prince hip-hop dynasty. Drake now stages an annual Houston Appreciation Weekend every Memorial Day, and in May, he skipped the Billboard Music Awards to play golf with Jas in Las Vegas. And Drake's nearly unprecedented success is just the latest chapter in the decades-long Prince family history.

...



Hip-hop has long been known as much for its impresarios as for its rappers. Sean “Puffy” Combs and Bad Boy, Bryan “Birdman” Williams and Cash Money, Dr Dre and his Beats empire — and the Princes are firmly in this tradition of self-made men. But James and Jas are at once far less known than hip-hop’s entrepreneurial icons and more quietly influential.

James founded Rap-A-Lot in the Fifth Ward in 1986, primarily as a means to get his brother Thelton Polk, who rhymed under the name Sir Rap-A-Lot, off the streets. “You rap”, James remembers telling his brother, “I’m gonna support you”.

Back then, hip-hop was confined to the coasts. “James Prince was one of the first empire builders in an area not called Los Angeles or New York City”, says Jeff Chang, author of *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. Even in major cities and among its biggest stars, hip-hop was just barely becoming a commercial enterprise. In 1986, Run-DMC released its third album, *Raising Hell*, which crashed the top 10 on Billboard’s albums chart primarily because of its Aerosmith collaboration, “Walk This Way”. An independent rapper like Sir Rap-A-Lot, in a city with no hip-hop history to speak of, couldn’t survive without the financial backing of his brother James, who ran a bevy of small businesses in Houston, including a used-car lot in the north-west part of the city.

The establishment of Rap-A-Lot was a hip-hop business proposition decades ahead of its time. Its founding came long before the Atlanta-driven Dirty South movement took off and nearly a decade before one of that region’s early pivotal moments. Outkast being named best new rap group at the Source Hip-Hop Music Awards in 1995. “The South got something to say!” proclaimed the group’s André 3000 prophetically as he was nearly drowned out by jeers from the crowd at Madison Square Garden’s Paramount Theater. More than 20 years later, the South, particularly Atlanta, isn’t just a dominant force in hip-hop, it is the music’s centre. Now, nearly every rapper of any import — Young Thug, Migos, Future — has deeply planted Southern roots.

The use of Rap-A-Lot in the mid to late 1980s and into the early 1990s proved that the South did indeed have something to say from the music’s inception, despite bias from the coastal elites. “They felt like we was country”, James says. “They made fun of our accents, but we spoke the language of the ghetto.”

James doesn’t mean “ghetto” in the narrow neighbourhood sense but as a signifier for poor,

struggling people everywhere. And Rap-A-Lot act the Geto Boys — which at first featured James’s brother Sir Rap-A-Lot, who later left the group — reflected that wide-ranging sensibility, rejecting the well-trodden world of gangster rap.

The Geto Boys released protest songs (1991’s “F*ck a War” is an anthem against the first Iraq war in which the group proclaims, “I ain’t goin’ to war for a shit talkin’ president”), songs about duplicitous street guys (1988’s “Snitches” foreshadows hip-hop’s embrace of “Stop Snitching” in the mid-2000s) and songs about suicide, depression, loneliness and paranoia, such as 1991’s “Mind Playing Tricks on Me”, which is not only one of hip-hop’s darkest and most introspective songs but also one of its best. “James Prince was bold”, says *Can’t Stop* author Chang. “He went against all the norms. Because you know that sex sells, but does horror sell? Does mental illness sell?”

Indeed, Rap-A-Lot pushed hip-hop’s sonic and lyrical possibilities at a time when the music was truly anti-establishment. In 1989 the FBI sent an angry letter to NWA’s distributor, Priority Records, about the group’s anthem “F*ck Tha Police” that scolded them for “advocating violence and assault” against law enforcement.

By the early 1990s the environment was so challenging for acts like NWA and the Geto Boys that when hip-hop maestro Rick Rubin released remixed and repackaged Geto Boys material on his Def American label in 1990, it came with a warning sticker affixed to the CD. “Def American Recordings is opposed to censorship. Our manufacturer and distributor, however, do not condone or endorse the content of this recording, which they find violent, sexist, racist and indecent.”

Having its artists saddled with “explicit lyrics” stickers in the early 1990s would seem like a fictionless run-in with power compared with Rap-A-Lot’s turbulent end of the decade. In the late 1990s the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Houston Police Department targeted James and Rap-A-Lot in a wide-ranging drug-trafficking investigation. “He [Prince] and his associates were believed to be large-scale drug dealers”, then Indiana representative Dan Burton later said in a congressional hearing. Years earlier, a car with dealer license plates allegedly from a Houston used-car lot owned by James had been stopped near El Paso with 76 kilos of cocaine stuffed in a hidden compartment. The investigation netted more than 20 convictions, yet James was never arrested, charged or indicted. He claimed the case was nothing more than part of a pattern of years-long harassment by law enforcement.





Long-serving African American congresswoman Maxine Waters wrote the Department of Justice about the investigation: "Simply put, Mr Prince believes strongly that the Department of Justice must intercede into the questionable practices of the DEA and provide him with the necessary protection to ensure that his life and livelihood are not subject to ongoing harassment and intimidation."

Waters's support of James stoked a wave of resentment within the DEA ranks. In the early 2000s, a DEA agent on the Rap-A-Lot case claimed the probe had been shut down and he was demoted after James allegedly donated \$200,000 to then vice president Al Gore's presidential campaign. James's camp called the allegation "absurd", and despite congressional hearings on the thwarted investigation, no records ever emerged of contributions from James or Rap-A-Lot to the Gore campaign or the Democratic National Committee.

"Can't be stopped, not even by a badge", Geto Boys' Scarface boasted in a song after the investigation had been quashed, infuriating the feds and engendering headlines such as RAP ARTIST TAUNTS DEA AND TWO AGENTS BY NAME. "Ain't enough bullshit in the United States to come stop this

Rap-A-Lot Mafia shut."

...

It's a late morning in mid-March 2016, more than 15 years after the death of the Rap-A-Lot DEA investigation, and James is eased back comfortably in a leather chair on the stage in a fourth-floor ballroom inside the Austin Convention Center. He is about to deliver a keynote address at South by Southwest, a highly prestigious festival slot that this year was also occupied by Tony Visconti, longtime producer for David Bowie and, incredibly, FLOTUS herself, Michelle Obama.

"Rap-A-Lot Records and South by Southwest are both celebrating their 30th year", Melissa O'Brien, the festival's music conference panels chief tells me. "We chose James as one of our keynotes because of his longevity in the music business and his stature as the godfather of Southern hip-hop."

Though small in stature — around two metres — with his wide build, ruddy cheeks and beard, James has the look of a bear you'd never want to encounter in the woods. But there's also something relaxed and retiree-like about this hip-

hop elder statesman. Today he sports a white dress shirt with blue paisley designs on its bulky cuffs, loose-fitting jeans and plain white tennis shoes.

In a slow, laconic Southern drawl that nonetheless carries with it the authority of a true boss, James addresses the packed ballroom of lanyard-sporting hip-hop heads, an ethnically and geographically diverse group that includes everyone from Houston rappers to Japanese hip-hop obsessives. He recounts the days when the full weight of the DEA was bearing down on him. "I was under attack by the feds", he says. "These guys put a full-blown attack on our hip-hop movement because we were making so much money. They felt something was crooked about our money." He cocks an eyebrow knowingly.

"THESE N**S AWAKENED A SLEEPING GIANT," JAMES PRINCE WARNED. "DO RIGHT BY ME AND PAY EVERY PENNY DUE."**

"They thought I was one-dimensional, so I diversified my portfolio." The federal scrutiny, he says, simply served as inspiration for his next move: as manager of boxing greats including Andre Ward and Floyd Mayweather Jr. "My first love was boxing", James says. "Music turned out to be a good distraction."

Later that afternoon, James and I meet in the lobby of his hotel in downtown Austin. After briefly introducing me to Jas, who hovers nearby, James explains that he's worried about co-operating with me on this story. "I hear you're the man with the stones", he says. I thank him for what sounds like a compliment, but then he suddenly leans toward me, turning unexpectedly serious. "That you like to dig." Before I can reply, he apologises and says he has to catch a private jet to California — one of his boxers, Ward, has a fight next weekend in Oakland. "We'll talk", James says, walking out through the hotel's revolving door and disappearing into a black

car. A few hours later a photo appears on Jas's Instagram account of him and his dad with a couple of friends posing in front of a private jet, bearing the caption "Family!" It's an appropriate message; I soon realise the moment is less about James shirking an interview than it is about him passing his hip-hop mantle to his son.

...

A month later I'm back in Houston, this time to meet with Jas, not James, at the Rap-A-Lot offices in the northwest section of the city, in a midcentury concrete structure with a pane of one-way glass that stretches its entire length — a near-perfect representation of the secretive, unflashy nature of the Prince family business.

As I pull up the driveway to the garage, a steel gate slowly slides open to reveal Jas, in tan Yeezys, skinny black jeans and a green T-shirt, and the Prince family's representative, Vivian Gomez. Like his father, Jas is small and sports a close beard, but he has softer features and Drake's fashion-conscious style, and he offers a gentle, compassionate handshake. Before we head upstairs he shows off his father's car collection, which includes a Bentley Azure, a silver Lamborghini Diablo and a 1938 Packard. It's a sprawling set of prized autos that, like the Prince family itself, encompasses decades of history.

Upstairs, the hallways of Rap-A-Lot offer a crash course in the rise of Houston hip-hop. Gold and platinum albums from label stars including the Geto Boys and Scarface hang on the walls. The Geto Boys' 1991 platinum album, *We Can't Be Stopped*, features a photo of member Bushwick Bill strapped to a hospital gurney after supposedly being shot by his girlfriend during an Everclear-soaked domestic-violence incident. In companion, James Prince's always-on-the-edge empire couldn't be further from the sensitive pop leanings of Drake.

A framed 2006 *Source* magazine cover featuring James, Bun B and other Houston greats proclaims, *DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS. WHY HOUSTON'S REIGN WON'T STOP*. The image captures a mid-2000s moment, when the city ruled supreme in the hip-hop world thanks to such hits as Houston-based Mike Jones's "Still Tippin'". A distribution deal with Warner Bros brought Houston hip-hop to the mainstream, a pact that James Prince forged. "My dad did the deal with Warner Bros", Jas says. "That was his deal. Nobody really knows that. It was his



Left: Drake, James Prince and Jas Prince in Washington, D.C. **Right:** Jas, an expert equestrian, rides his horse at the Prince family ranch in Waller County, Texas.

movement. He put it together.” On James’s desk sits a wood-carved nameplate given to him by an imprisoned fan. Indeed, James’s name rings so strongly in the federal and state prison system that he regularly receives “hobbycraft” — homemade gifts — from inmates around the country.

In a business known for rough players like Suge Knight, it is a reputation that is singularly intimidating. For years James has been linked to Larry Hoover, alleged leader of the sprawling Chicago-born street gang the Gangster Disciples, which according to the Department of Justice is currently active in some 24 states. James has denied all accusations of criminality and has often taken to court anyone who has linked him to Hoover. In 2007, according to court documents, he sued BET, Apple and Viacom for defamation over the network’s American Gangster documentary series, an episode of which pictured him and Hoover together.

But the spectre of the Gangster Disciples looms large — in both the streets and in the hip-hop community — over anyone who might cross James. When federal prosecutors in Georgia indicted dozens of Gangster Disciples on charges ranging from drug trafficking to murder, they alleged that the gang had threatened a rapper they would identify only as RR “with physical harm unless rapper RR paid the Gangster Disciples for the use of the gang’s name and symbols.” RR is widely believed to be multiplatinum rapper Rick Ross, in 2012 members of the gang threatened him in a video posted online — and later picked up

by TMZ — for using its name and appropriating its imagery.

Such suspected gang ties are all the more frightening because of the very real acts of violence that have reportedly been linked to James, including a 2003 incident in which he was accused of sending associates to the Top Rank Gym in Las Vegas to beat associates of former client Floyd Mayweather Jr. with baseball bats. The James-Mayweather beef was allegedly over an unpaid debt, and in 2015 a similar skirmish broke out between James and Cash Money. In the midst of son Jas’s battle with Cash Money over Drake profits, James released a “courtesy call”, posted on TMZ, warning, “These niggas awakened a sleeping giant. . . I will not allow it to stay on my track record that Cash Money took anything from me and my son. Do right by me and pay every penny due.”

...

With the Rap-A-Lot office tour concluded, Jas and I head to the heart of the Fifth Ward, his ancestral home and the site of Drake’s recent rooftop show. Here I see the flip side of the gangster mythology: the love of home and the bonds between family, both blood and neighbour, and the importance of home turf. “I love Houston”, Jas says as he navigates the traffic on I-610 in his Mercedes G-Class SUV. “I did a lot of fishing, riding horses growing up. This is Texas, there’s horses everywhere.” He points to smaller side roads beside 610. “Ride horses all through here”, he says.

After switching to I-69, we exit the freeway and, just a few feet from the off-ramp in the Fifth Ward, stop at the corner of Lyons Avenue and Schwartz Street. There’s a tiled mural, the first panel of which reads WELCOME TO FIFTH WARD, EST 1865. Below this welcome is the inscription, from Matthew 7:16, “By their fruit you will recognise them.”

Created in 2006, the mural — Fruits of the Fifth Ward — recognises the many greats produced by the neighbourhood, including bluesman Lightnin’ Hopkins, boxing titan George Foreman, congresswoman Barbara Jordan, the first African-American woman to deliver a keynote at the Democratic National Convention, and on the fourth and last panel, James Prince. Directly beneath James, rendered by the artist with a knowing smile, is another verse from the Gospel of Matthew, this time 7:18: “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”

When we drive to the heart of the Fifth Ward — which is dominated by blocks of dilapidated 1970s-style ranch residences and 1930s shotgun homes — it’s clear that James has taken such biblical guidance to heart. In the 3000 block of Jensen Drive he opened a sprawling community centre that’s available to neighbourhood kids at no cost, every day, from eight AM to nine PM, featuring a basketball court, a study room and several band rooms replete with brass instruments.

Inside one of the band rooms, Jas picks up a pair of drumsticks and taps distractedly on a long



Jas Prince in front of a wall of gold and platinum records amassed by Drake, Jas's greatest discovery yet

row of snares as he dials up one of his new artists, Tone Stith, whom Jas describes as “equal parts Prince, Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones.” Jas was introduced to the 21-year-old artist thanks to longtime friend Justin Bieber, who was so impressed with Stith’s covers of his work that he implored Jas to listen to them. Since connecting with Jas in 2013, Stith has written and produced two songs, “Liquor” and “Make Love,” for Chris Brown’s 2015 album, *Royalty*. When Stith picks up the call, I can hear him shouting with glee at the FaceTime-guided tour of the band room — Jas later tells me Stith’s a huge band head — shouting, “Drumline is coming!” We head to the corner of Liberty and Staples, where Drake has just held court, and Jas points out a building where, he says, his father has built a “ghetto Fifth Ward penthouse with two condos.” James is attached to this Fifth Ward intersection because he was raised right around the corner, on nearby Ranch Street. Jas’s grandmother also grew up on Ranch.

As we drive back toward Interstate 610, I ask Jas if the Fifth Ward has ever undergone the sort of transformation seen in majority-black neighborhoods in Chicago and New Orleans, where city government demolished the projects and replaced them with mixed-income housing, changing the face of these areas forever. “Nah, we still have our projects,” Jas says with a laugh. “One thing about Fifth Ward, they ain’t came and touch anything.” He pauses and smiles. “Before they touch it,” he says, “my dad will buy it.”

James Prince owns Fifth Ward real estate, washatenas, a waffle house, a condom company, a record label and a boxing-management company. But the jewel of the Prince empire is Prince Estates, a sprawling ranch in rural East Texas about a one-hour drive from Mo Mo’s.

“THEY AIN’T CAME AND TOUCH ANYTHING,” SAYS JAS OF THE FIFTH WARD. “BEFORE THEY TOUCH IT MY DAD WILL BUY IT.”

It’s a rolling pastoral property comprising lakes, horse stables and horse trails, along with 120 Black Angus cows that mill about the property, all managed by an affable rancher in the Prince family’s employ named Ben Dyer.

When I meet Jas on the ranch on a blazingly hot Sunday afternoon, he is already astride a sleek, beautiful brown horse with a blonde mane and is dressed in a blue T-shirt and faded jeans that are tucked into his cowboy boots. He gallops around the ranch with the authority and ease of a true equestrian, swatting the horse with a switch in his left hand on the few occasions it disobeys his orders.

Returning to the stable where I’m waiting, Jas urges me to mount up as well. We ride several miles deep into the property, to a wooden cabin that was once owned by country music star Clint Black. Inside, we take refuge in the air-conditioning as Dyer and the ranch hands tend to the horses’ needs. Jas tells me Prince Estates

is such a profound refuge for him that he’ll often come out here, ride one of his horses into the farthest reaches and take a nap under one of the many live oaks.

It’s here that Jas reflects on the father-son empire. Sometimes, he confesses, he’ll wonder of his dad, What did he do back in the day to gain the respect he has? Jas wanders over to an antique phonograph in the living room and drops the needle. As 19th-century waltz music plays, the crackle and pop of old vinyl augmenting the eeriness, he reflects on the Prince family empire and, as Houstonian Beyoncé recently put it, “Daddy Lessons.” “Drake at over 1 billion for just Views,” Jas says, beaming. “Even Drake is surprised. My dad, this is what he taught me.” He surveys Prince Estates, and his pride in the ranch visibly swells.

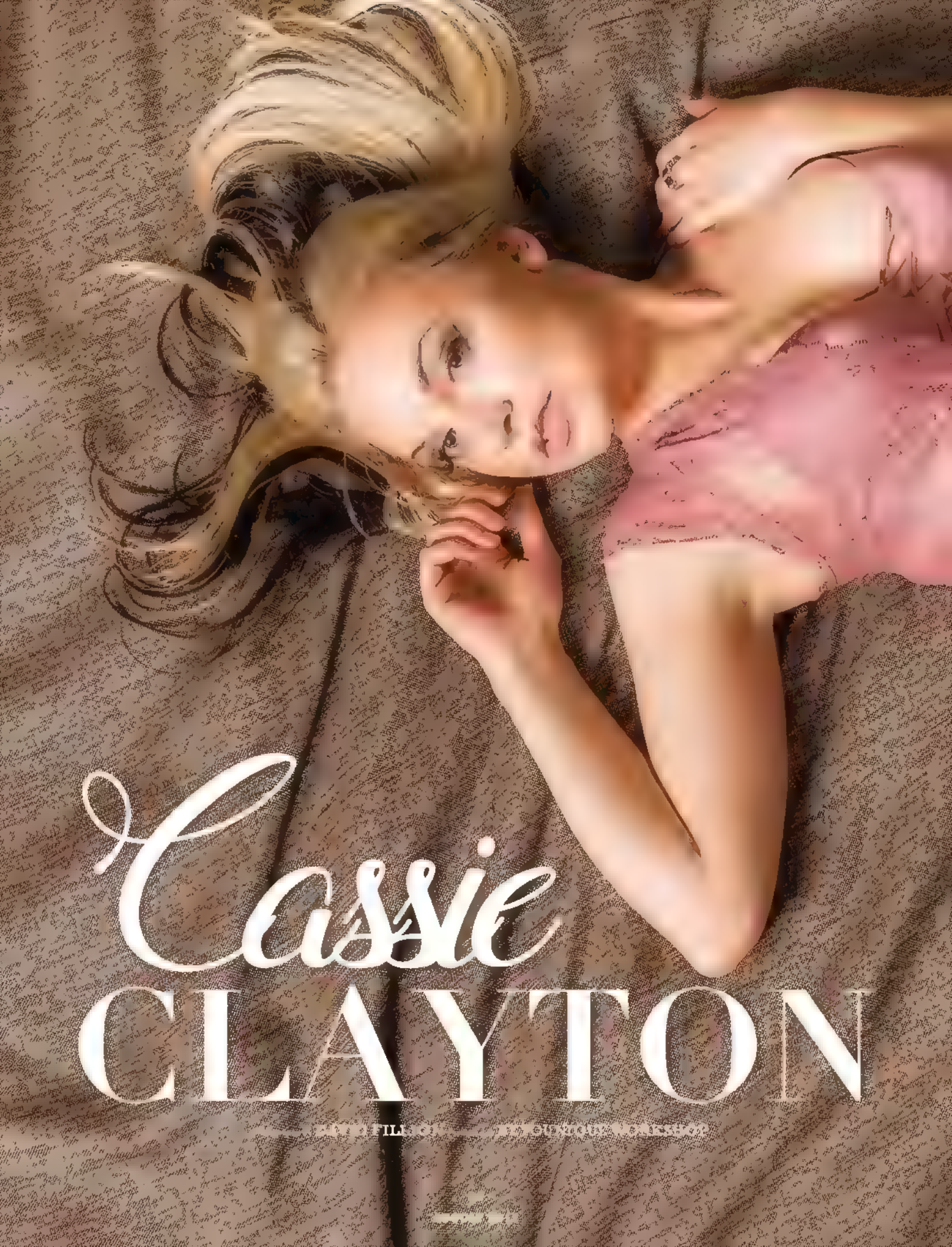
It’s hard not to be swept up in the moment. The 1000-plus acres owned by the Princes sits in Hempstead, a small city in Waller County, Texas. This is the site of one of the most painful and poignant moments in the Black Lives Matter era, the July 2015 arrest during a violent traffic stop of motorist Sandra Bland,

who then allegedly hanged herself in the county lockup. Waller County’s white supremacist history stretches centuries before Bland’s death. At least five lynchings occurred there between 1877 and 1950, and in 2008 the Department of Justice filed a complaint against the county over its voter registration practices that allegedly violated both the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. So the ownership of land in the deepest South by two black Princes, James and Jas, is a revolutionary act that harkens back to General Sherman’s Civil War order to redistribute land to black families (best known as “40 acres and a mule”), which was later overturned by President Andrew Johnson. But here is a spread the Prince family took, step by step, hustle by hustle, track by track, download by download. “Own it,” Jas says, stretching out on a couch in the cabin. “That’s what I learned from my dad. He’s big on owning. Not renting or leasing. No, own it.” ■



LOOK, MARGE...
It's another one
of those BUM DEALS...

Smith/17



Cassie
CLAYTON

Photo: FILL: c... with G... ..





About me

I am 26 years old and living in Toronto Canada. I am currently in school and work as a server at Back Dog Pub. I am also an independent Consultant with Arbonne. I have been modeling now for the past 7 years and have had over a dozen publications. I am currently a brand ambassador for BeYOUNque Models and model with Bombshe's Exclusives.

My hobbies and interests

Singing, dancing, cooking, and fitness.

My goals and career ambitions

To graduate from Centennial College and become an Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant. I also hope to thrive in my modeling business and be able to travel the world.

Who inspires me

My mother and model mentor Amandy Ranger.

My favourite quote

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Turn on

Honesty and Dior Sauvage cologne.

Turn off

Olives in my food and cars.

The perfect date

Going someplace on a beach, drinking wine and looking up at the stars.

My girl crush

Jennifer Aniston.

My favourite food

Pizza.

My biggest fear

Leaving the ones that love.

One destination I'd love to visit

Bora Bora.

I'm not embarrassed to say

That I have flaws and have made mistakes.

For more of Cassie's adventures you can follow her on Instagram @classycassie_26 or on Facebook at Cassie Clayton.





AUGUST 2012





FRIEND ZONE

ADV SOR

How Do I Friend-Zone Her Without Being a Dick?

Q: *I met a woman on OkCupid; we've gone on five dates and slept together once. Although I find her attractive, a spark is missing. I like hanging out with her, but I definitely don't want us to keep dating. I've been texting her less often and mentioning other women, but she still asks me out. How do I put her in the friend zone?*

END THE :|

A: You're just not into her. It happens. You cannot feign chemistry — and don't try, because pheromones will win every time. It's important for you to realise that no matter how you present it, the term friend zone implies rejection, and not many people take kindly to being rejected. Unless the two of you are as serene as high priestess Gwyneth Paltrow and puppy dog Chris Martin, a "conscious uncoupling" is tricky to navigate, particularly if you don't have much history together. That said, it's not impossible, as long as you avoid the mistakes most men make when trying to bail on an intimate relationship.

First off, don't suddenly start acting squirrely, being less responsive or flaking on plans. Instead of ripping off the Band-Aid, you'll only be tugging on it hair by painful hair. In this attempt to avoid confrontation, you'll end up hurting her more.

You should also not bench her. That's when a man knows he can't give a woman the commitment she desires but keeps her in his orbit for occasional sex or companionship. A common example of this is asking her to "Netflix and chill" every time you sense she's pulling away. When you know she has feelings for you but have no intention of taking it to the next level, this is an egregiously selfish move.

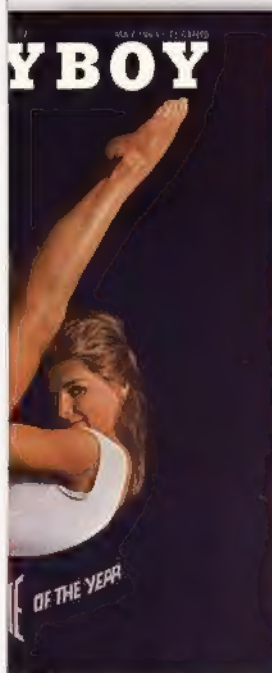
Whatever you do, don't pull the most common of break-up tactics and ghost her. Many argue that in today's age of low-stakes dating, disappearing without any explanation is acceptable behaviour. I disagree. It's the most cowardly way to disengage. Ghosting leaves the other person in a purgatory where he or she will never stop wondering, "Was it something I said?" To ghost someone shows zero respect for their feelings and betrays a complete lack of integrity. No one wins.

Lastly, if you want to stay friends, there's only one way to go about it, and it's the scariest: Tell her the truth. Recently I went on a few dates with a man I liked. He knew I was looking for something serious because I was up-front with him from the get-go. Four dates in, he told me his feelings didn't match the intensity of mine. Yes, I was disappointed, but I appreciated his candour. Because of that, he and I are

now friends — after enough time had passed to allow my bruised ego to heal. Which brings me to the most important thing to remember when friend-zoning someone: Even if you're honest about what you want, you can't control the outcome. In the end, whether she wants to stay friends with you is her decision. Do your best to express your feelings honestly — something many men find difficult but that returns dividends. Your willingness to be forthright will reveal just how much you respect her, and that's a step in the right direction.

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